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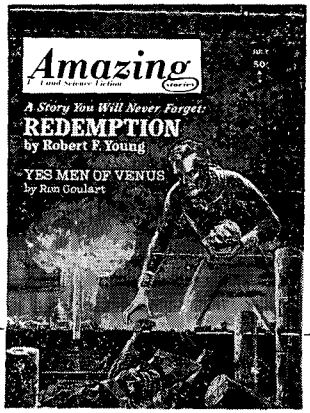

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FANTASTIC
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

JULY 1963
Volume 12 Number 7

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Illustrating *Trouble With Tweenity*

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According to you...

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

I think you are doing an excellent job with FANTASTIC.

Re David Bunch: I like him very much. In view of all the criticism visible in the letter columns, I would desire to reassure Mr. Bunch that some of the silent mass do appreciate him. If it would make him feel better, the year Moderan burst on us was the year I started two-year subscriptions. I won't say that I would cancel without him, but I'd sure *look* for him.

Since my naturally carping nature is being inhibited by all this sweetness, let me remark that lovable as many of your letter-writers are, their comments do suggest that many of them are truants from remedial reading courses.

This comes from a fairly old-time reader of the genre. The first copy of WEIRD TALES I have saved (O what we throw away!) is 1936. My uncle, who was then the proper dean of a very proper law school, used to slip them to me. When observed, he claimed he bought them "for the child." The fact that he read them first, year around, was a secret still kept. In those days the great thrill was when the green octopus chased the heroine thru the swamps of Venus and she lost her brassiere. Now it's vice versa, but just as thrilling.

Anna Livia Plurabelle

● *How do you mean, vice versa? Does the girl chase the monster? Does the monster lose its brassiere? Does the girl find a bra in the swamps? Now* there's *the kernel of a story idea!*

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

To state that I am very angry in regard to the mutilation of my letter which was printed in February FANTASTIC is to put it mild-

(*Continued on page 128*)

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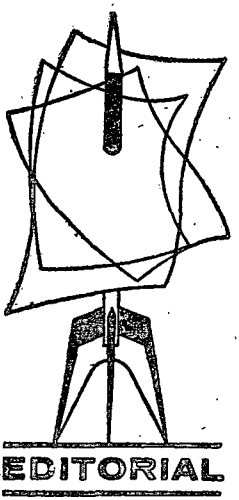

NOT long ago 100 U.S. scientists, at a meeting sponsored by the Space Science Board of the National Academy of Sciences, called upon the Federal Government to make the search for extra-terrestrial life the "top-priority scientific mission" of our national space program.

For those of us who have long needed no special urging to believe that there must be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, this comes as good, if belated, news. But there was another item in the papers about the same time that made us wonder whether our seekers-after-alien-life would be hidebound in their search by beauracracy. One can imagine an excited astro-biologist reporting the discovery of a new life form, and being asked to file in triplicate, or something.

The second item—the one that made us pause—was about the high temperatures which have plagued *Mercury* capsule interiors and *Mariner* instrumentation. According to Atmospheric Sciences Prof. Konrad Buettner, of the University of Washington, the 110-degree F. temperature inside *Mercury* could have been cut by 50 to 80 degrees if the exterior of the capsule had been painted a heat-reflecting white—as are the Soviet counterparts of *Mercury* capsules. *Mariner* could have been cooled off to prevent its batteries from over-heating.

Says Prof. Buettner: "I've written to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, to Von Braun, and spoken to other NASA officials, and nobody seems to know why we send up dark spacecraft or who ordered it that way. It's becoming a fascinating detective story trying to find the answer."

Perhaps some Civil Service clerk lost the forms requisitioning the white paint?

* * *

Not long ago *Playboy* indulged in some fanciful flights concerning songs which might mark our first meeting with aliens. Some of the titles were: *You Go to My Heads; How Much is That Earthman in the Window?; For Every Mandible There's a Woman;* and *I Wonder What's Kissing Her Now?* How about some suggestions from you out there?—NL

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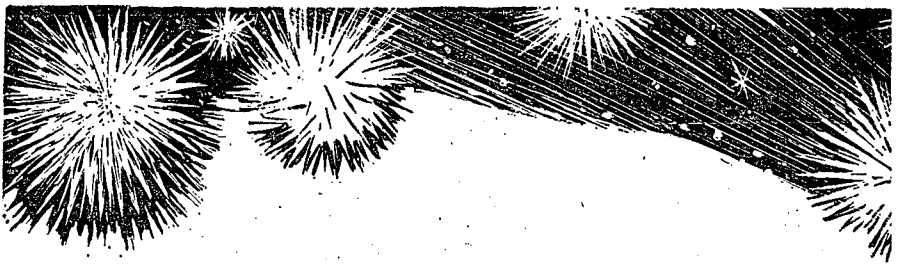
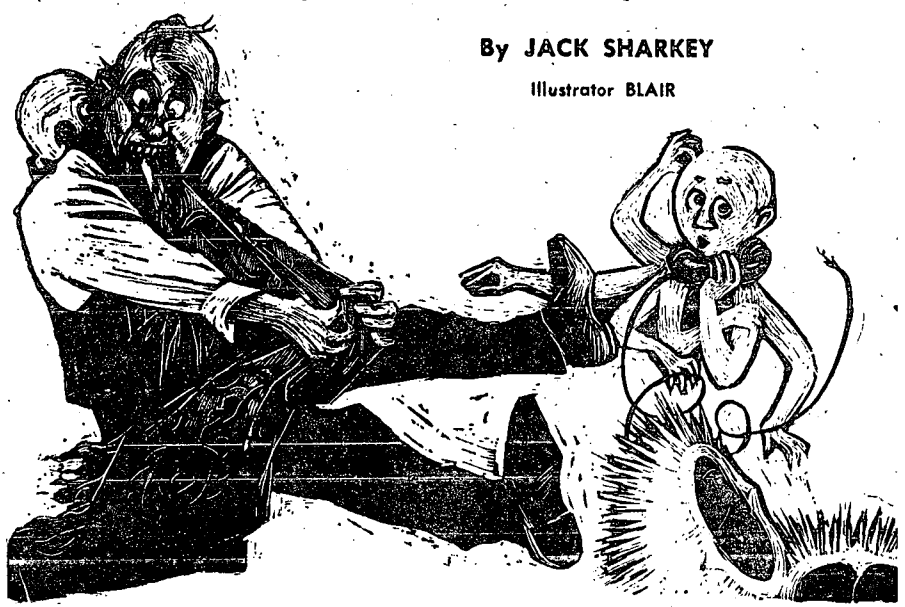


At first it seemed as if Herr Dokter Franck's discovery of the property of "undecided" matter would solve all America's problems. But that was before President Carbo learned—the hard way—about . . .

the TROUBLE WITH TWEENITY

By JACK SHARKEY

Illustrator BLAIR



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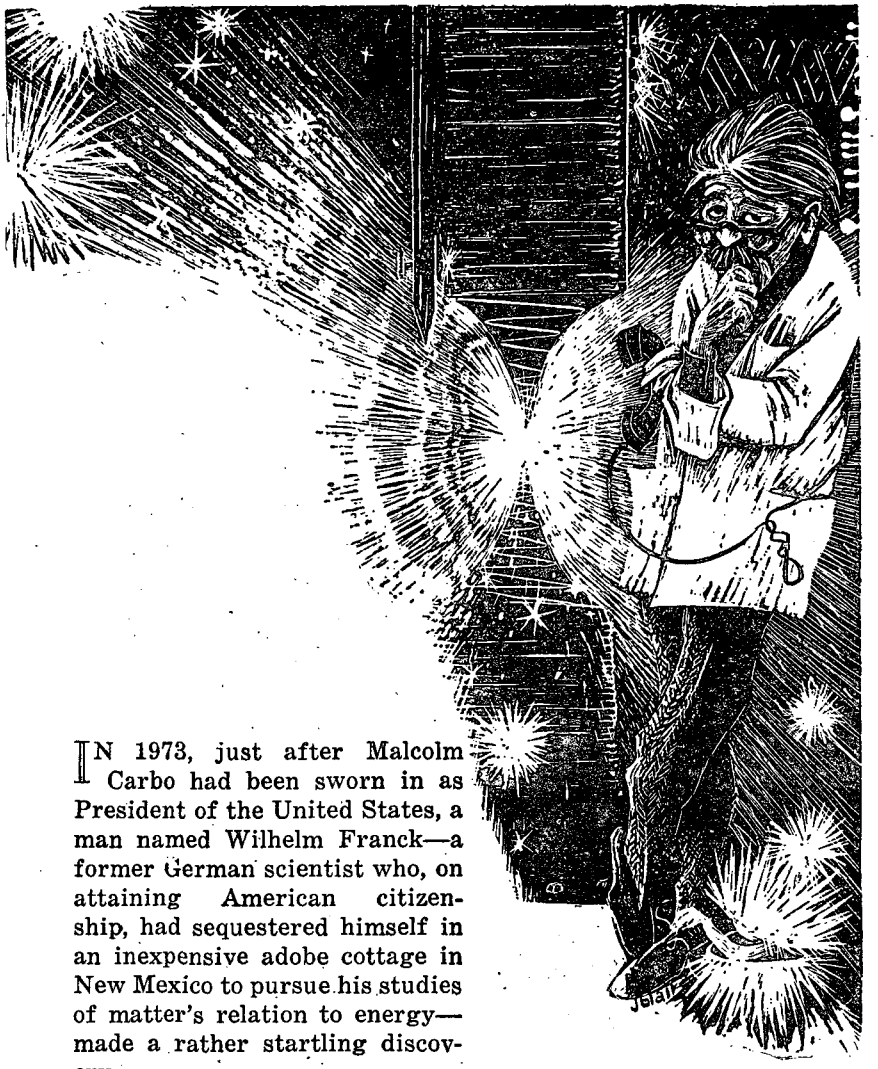

IN 1973, just after Malcolm Carbo had been sworn in as President of the United States, a man named Wilhelm Franck—a former German scientist who, on attaining American citizenship, had sequestered himself in an inexpensive adobe cottage in New Mexico to pursue his studies of matter's relation to energy—made a rather startling discovery.

In the course of his work, he had been testing the theory of absolute destruction of matter by

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the process of mingling normal matter with contraterrene (or anti-) matter, during which mingling, of course, the inverted polarities of the contraterrene matter should have effectively canceled out the very being of normal matter, through the neutralization of negative electrons and positive nuclei by their anti-counterparts. But every time he did it, he got leftovers. An awful lot of leftovers.

Always, in the grip of the magnetic "scale" within his mingling machine, the absolute vanishment of both normal and contranormal matter produced a mass-reduction of barely a trillionth of the original atomic mass. Even with the two forms of matter utterly gone, *something* was left. Something that—though undetectable through any of the senses—made up the *bulk* (!) of atomic mass.

It was on the basis of this massy leftover product—or residue, if you will—that Wilhelm Franck postulated his revolutionary "Theory of Tweenity". This theory was simplicity itself, merely stating that—somewhere, ranging in *between* normal (or positive) matter and contranormal (or negative) matter—there existed an (for all practical purposes) infinite range of other polarities of matter. These, since they lay between positive matter and negative matter, the only two possible limits of extantness, Wilhalm dubbed "undecided" matter, his thinking being influenced by the national craze for poll-taking.

On this base he erected the next logical postulate: "If such varieties of varipolar atoms exist, in *conjunction* with other matter, then there must necessarily exist an infinite number of universes, each composed of atoms that agree in varipolarity with each other." Once the proper train of thought had been hinted at, it was an easy matter to ride this train to its destination: The infinity of conjunctive universes. This was done through the construction of the now-famous tripolar electromagnet, along whose length a sliding-pole was constructed, which—by the most microminute adjustments of its position—could generate any of the Tweenities lying between the two forms of matter.

Wilhelm, being no fool, immediately applied for a patent on his invention, then magnanimously donated it to his adopted country and returned to obscurity in New Mexico.

THE time-consuming task of building the actual tripolar generator having taken Wilhelm nearly four years (he had no assistants), it fell under the jurisdiction of Malcolm Carbo just as the Election of '76 came up.

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Carbo had been elected in '72 on a platform of valve-adjustment. That is, he had faithfully promised to do his utmost to ease the ghastly pressures that made the average citizen's morale about as limpid as the interior of a steamboiler. During office, he had attempted a reduction of taxes, but had to scrap this program when his advisors explained that this meant a decrease in revenues. He had also to scrap his plan to build a federal recreation park in every major city when his advisors explained that this meant an increase in taxes. And his promise of a cheap, government-produced charcoal grill for every family in the country was killed by the report of his investigators that the voters in metropolitan areas—where most of the votes came from in the first place—had no back yards in which to utilize the grills, and that the stringent fire-laws forbade their use inside apartment buildings. So Carbo very desperately needed a whinging of a promise to make the people if he hoped to even stay in the primaries.

And that is when the Tweenity-Producer—Wilhelm Franck's tri-polar electromagnet—fell into Carbo's hands.

It didn't take a genius (luckily for Malcolm Carbo) to see that he had within his grasp the answer to the most aggravating morale-pincher peculiar to the American populace, one which regularly drove grown men to tears, women to cursing, teenagers to become highway statistics, and all of them—in another sense—to noplace at all: The Parking Problem.

With nearly eight million automobiles produced each year in America, and the old ones refusing to get off the streets to make room for the new, there was no longer enough road-length in the country to contain the combined lengths of the cars, even bumper-to-bumper, and if it had not been for two- and three-lane roadways, which allowed the cars to travel side by side, no one would have been able to get anywhere at all. Even so, people had begun to find that no matter where they went, they were unable to find a spot to stop the car and get out, at least legally. There was a relentlessly growing slump in business for vacation areas, as a direct result of this, not to mention a rash of cars which cluttered the highway-shoulders in phony-states of malfunction, drivers having gotten clever enough to run out of gas within walking distance of their destinations, and even women drivers learning how to flood engines, sever transmission shafts, and clog carburetors. Experts predicted that within eighteen months, even a minor traffic jam

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in Topeka would have bumper-repercussions from Los Angeles to Newark. "No Passing" signs were taken down when passing at all had become even a truck-driver's wistful fantasy. "Stop" signs, too, became obsolete when it was found that no one who cherished his tailfins dared obey them. And the stockholders in prominent oil companies began to panic when it was discovered that a clever driver could travel cross the continent on one gallon of gasoline by simply inserting his car into the endless traffic-flow at the right moment (and, of course, pointed in the desired direction). The only happy people were the manufacturers of house-trailers, the average American family having given itself over in despair to a gypsy existence, most of the trailers even possessing a low-slung "Palms Read As You Ride" window at which the mother—while father desperately kept to a coincided speed at the wheel—could earn the family's keep by predicting great things for passing one-handed drivers. (The most popular prediction being, of course, the finding of a parking space.)

No statistics are available on the incidence of carbon-monoxide poisonings in the whizzing welter of traffic, since drivers who perished at the wheel simply kept moving with their wedged-in vehicle until they were beyond a state of decomposition before which the precise cause of death could have been ascertained. Drive-In movies, banks, and restaurants had to be abandoned when it was found that no one was driving out. Road-repair gangs were out of work until some method could be found to see whether or not there was still a road to be repaired. And when the highways were further jammed by the heaven-sent presence of the newly invented "Rolling Restrooms" (underwritten by the National Kidney Foundation), Howard Johnson filed for bankruptcy.

THEN Malcolm Carbo, in his historic pre-election speech, made the promise that gave new heart to the hapless hordes of road-weary rovers: ". . . unobstructed travel, at unmonitored speeds, with unlimited parking facilities!" He was re-elected by a landslide (which occurred on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and successfully immobilized enough of the country's voters to allow them to pause at the polls).

Farflung federal agencies were soon afterward given the plans for the construction (quite simple, now that Wilhelm Franck had pointed the way) of individual Tweenity-Generators, and within six months of Carbo's return to office, every car, bus,

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truck, motorcycle, motorscooter and power bicycle in the country had been issued (at a whopping cost) their own personal federal license-plate, each plate-number being (in case the driver had a short memory) likewise the frequency-number of the plate's built-in generator. The field generated, in one of the Tweenity regions, passed through the framework and chassis of the vehicle, and rendered it instantly—that is, as soon as the ignition was turned on—into another plane of existence, driver, passengers and all. Each driver now had an entire Earth of his own on which to travel, his being the only vehicle on the new planet. Everyone should have been elated and cozily content. But there were certain problems:

1) The Tweenity planets had no roads. This meant that any people except jeep-owners usually bogged down into soft earth within a few yards of their entrance-field. A nation-wide wail of protest from returning would-be travelers soon reached Malcolm Carbo's ears. He was equal to the task, however. He put the government engineers and all the usable government facilities on crash program to turn out a cheap (people were still rankling about the cost of those license plates), ultra-adjustable caterpillar tread that could be installed by even the most inept mechanics on current models of all vehicles. True, installing the tread meant the removal of the nice shiny fenders from the vehicles (or the front wheels would be unable to turn), but thanks to the perfect privacy of one's own Tweenity region, no one cared any longer if the neighbors saw how junky the car looked, since one had no neighbors in Tweenity. So Malcolm Carbo sat back and was just about to relax, when it was discovered that—

2) Quite a large number of cars were now turning up without drivers, popping into existence on roads, in fields, and sometimes inside buildings. This —luckily for the hapless owners of the cars—was a problem with an easy solution: Anyone finding such a vehicle reported it to the police, who in turn got hold of a mechanic who could start a car without having the ignition key, and the police would bring the car back to the Tweenity region where the plate told them who the owner was, where they would find him for their time and trouble, and warn him not to let his battery run down while he was out of the car again. Simple though this solution was, however, there were not nearly enough policemen to cope with the frequency of the problem's occurence, so Malcolm Carbo—after getting a seventeen-mail-bag load of complaints from an-

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gry constituents—put his engineers on the job again, and the government was soon able to issue drivers Personal Tweenity Generators matching the frequency of this vehicle (additional generators for relatives, friends, and any other passengers available at cost). So once again Malcolm Carbo started to lean back and rest his weary head, when a report was laid on his desk that—

3) The F.B.I. was disbanding. The agents felt they could no longer do their job properly, under "the circumstances". When a shocked Malcolm Carbo phoned the bureau's offices to inquire as to what "the circumstances" were, he reached only an old cleaning lady, everyone else having gone home. She, however, filled him in on the facts: Since the general use of Tweenity Generators had come about, the national murder rate had dropped to zero. However, the incidence of missing persons had soared. The F.B.I. had suspected at once that unscrupulous persons were —literally—taking their victims for a ride. Tweenity being what it was, a missing person's body could be on any one of a trillion "Earths", buried in any handy patch of ground, and even the F.B.I. wasn't up to that much delving. And while Carbo was vainly trying to recover from this latest catastrophe, his desk phones began jangling, and when he answered, he learned—

4) The vacation resorts were closing. Angry owners in Miami, Sun Valley, Palm Springs, and the like, were planning to sue him for alienation of affections. It seemed that vacationists, rather than utilizing Tweenity for just the *trip* to the mountains, the seashore, or whatever, were likewise utilizing the mountains, seashore, and whatever, in Tweenity. (After all, why should the vacationists have paid exorbitant rates to stay at a hotel near a beach, for instance, when they could have a beach all to themselves for nothing?) "Don't worry!" Carbo shakily assured the complainants, "They have to come back sometime. There are things like food, and jobs, and—" But the irate owners hung up on him, just in time for his phones to jangle again, and when he picked them up, it was to find that—

5) Every state and city police force in the country was disbanding. It was impossible to fight crime anymore. Once-honest families were suddenly appearing in the family car in bands, armed with empty boxes, right in the middle of supermarkets, clothing stores, warehouses, or any place that held whatever the family felt it needed, and the families, from Junior through Great Grandma, would

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snatch up all they could, leap into the car, and vanish. It was no use trying to find their section of Tweenity by the license number; the plates had been either removed or covered over with tape. Once a handyman saw how a generator worked, he could easily build one of his own, no longer needing the identifying license's generator. (This last was illegal, but there was no way of enforcing the anti-home-made-generator law.) The theft rate was skyrocketing, the police reported sadly. In fact, the only cheery note in the whole business was that traffic violations were down to nothing. Malcolm Carbo hung up the phone, and began to sob helplessly. His siege of self-pity was interrupted by the arrival of his Secretary of Defense with the news that the Communist countries were—on learning of the sudden population-depletion of the U.S., planning to sneak over and invade the country. Carbo ordered the man to call an immediate alert for National Emergency, and was told that there no longer was a workable military complement, because—

a) Jeep-loads of soldiers vanished between the PX and their duty-stations.

b) Planes that took off had stopped coming back.

c) Ships which had sailed out of sight stayed that way.

d) No submarine had re-surfaced in four weeks.

e) Eighteen military bases had—after requisitioning inordinate amounts of pizza and beer—vanished entirely.

Then Malcolm Carbo had the best idea he'd had in all his years of public service: "Sam," he said to the Secretary of Defense, "do we still have a long list of Soviet spies whom we have not yet arrested?" When Sam admitted that such was the case, since not enough evidence had been amassed against these spies to make their conviction certain, Carbo smiled grimly, looked Sam conspiratorially in the eyes, and said:

"Why don't we let them steal the secret of the Tweenity Generator?!"

Sam dashed out to arrange the details, and shortly thereafter in Moscow, the premier, with a lot of gloating, arranged for sending an invisible task force to the shores of the U.S.A. "It will be a slaughter," he chuckled. "My soldiers can take up key positions throughout the country, and then emerge from Tweenity and capture every important installation!" The task force was called up, given its orders, and sent, and the premier waited for news of the U.S.A.'s defeat. And waited. And waited. . . .

Then all at once, there was a

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strange turn to the crime waves which had been sweeping our country (and all the other countries of the world, too): One item that was always stolen was Insect Repellent. While Carbo was still trying to figure this out, the people began to reappear from their retreats in Tweenity, not a few of them bee-stung, and all of them flea-bitten. And the complaints began to flow in by mail, phone and telegram: Tweenity was going buggy, with real bugs. The people demanded that something be done about it, or Carbo could be assured of never getting another vote except his own.

Baffled, but determined to stick with his job (he knew no other way of life), Carbo ordered a jet, and took off for a certain adobe cottage in New Mexico.

Wilhelm Franck greeted him cordially, settled him comfortably on a lab bench, and gave him a beaker of coffee, then asked: "What brings big important you to the home of humble little me?"

"Bugs," said Carbo. "Tweenity is getting cluttered with insects, and the people can't keep swatting and scratching all the time. What's behind it all, Franck? Tweenity used to be deserted except for the travelers."

"Adaptability," said Franck, after a moment's thought. "Insects within the field of the cars have been carried into Tweenity, have laid their eggs, and the eggs have hatched into a new Tweenity-breed of bugs. And, of course, with no natural enemies to keep their numbers down, the insects have flourished. I forget how many hundred or thousand eggs a female lays, but if the females thus hatched out also lay eggs, etcetera, etcetera, it would not take long for each Tweenity planet to be a kind of Nirvana for nits."

"We've got to stop it!" Carbo cried. "The people are awfully mad at me. They demand a happy Tweenity as one of their Constitutional *rights*, now! They're like a small child. The child can survive without getting a lollipop, but once you've given it a lollipop, you don't dare try to take it back!"

"It is a problem," Franck admitted. "I will work on it."

"But I must have assurances," Carbo pleaded. "Can't I give them some kind of hint, maybe? One of my advisors said that perhaps you could send the bugs' *enemies* into Tweenity, and restore the status quo . . ."

"It would not work," Franck sighed. "You see, the enemies—such as birds—would only live so long as their appetite for insects was sated, then they would perish of starvation. And who can say that, before they perished, they would eat every one—every

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last one, mind you!—of the insects in a given Tweenity region? If they missed just *one* pregnant female—!" Wilhelm Franck spread his fingers wide and gave a sad little shrug. "The entire process would be repeated."

"Then *what?*" begged Carbo.

"What we need, of course," said Franck, "is an enemy that can live independently of insects, that is, on some other source of nutrition, so that the level of the insect population can be kept down. What I have in mind is a new mutation on an insectivorous plant, the Venus Flytrap. It can survive on nutrients in the soil, but at the same time can mop up a lot of bugs."

"But isn't that a tropical plant? Most of my trouble is in the temperate regions."

"True," sighed Franck. "The plant cannot withstand moderate climates for long. However, I will work on it."

"And another thing," cried Carbo, remembering, "when a flytrap closes over an insect, it stays shut for weeks! Insects breed faster than they can be eaten."

"Yes," sighed Franck again. "That is another problem. The plant's slow digestibility. However, if I can produce *enough* plants, that should not be a problem. I will work on it."

THIS being the only promise Carbo could elicit from the old scientist, he gave up and returned to Washington. The fact that a sadly understaffed communist regime throughout Europe and Asia had fallen to a new peasants' revolution was barely enough to keep his spirits up. Carbo had a country full of itchy people to make happy; the foreign situation was not enough to please a war-apathetic populace that could formerly have escaped into Tweenity, anyhow.

So he waited. A month. Two months. Six months. The people were angry, restless, and traffic-snarled again. An awful lot of ugly talk about impeachment, recall, and by-election was floating around. Once a day, Garbo phoned Wilhelm Franck, and once a day, Franck reported that he was "working on it."

Then, in the early months of winter of 1977, Carbo's phone rang, and it was Wilhelm. "Mr. President," said the old scientist. "Look out the window! What do you see?"

Carbo looked. The air was aswirl with tiny white clusters. "Snow," he retorted into the phone. "And if you wish me a happy White Christmas, I'll have you shot."

"Mis-ter President!" said Wilhelm, much hurt. "I do not pay long-disance rates for mere social amenities. Look again from the window. Catch a flake and examine it!"

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Frowning suspiciously, but having nothing better to do, Carbo went to the window and did as instructed. In his hand—before it melted—he saw, not a six-sided lacy crystal, but a spiky blob, gaping like a half-pried oyster shell. He brushed his hands together with a shudder, and returned to the phone.

"What the hell was that?!" he demanded. "It looked like a cross between an albino hedgehog and a baby clam."

"Better yet," said a triumphant Wilhelm Franck. "It was a cross between a flytrap-blossom and a snowflake!"

"Impossible!" snapped Carbo. "You can't interbreed a plant with a snowflake!"

"Not by normal means, certainly," said Franck, "but by inter-Tweenity overlapping, anything is possible."

"Don't talk gibberish!" cried Carbo. "What in heaven's name is inter-Tweenity overlapping?"

"Very simple," said the scientist. "On a designated spot in *our* Earth, you place a flytrap. "In the same spot in the adjacent Tweenity, you place a corresponding weight of snowflakes. In the *next* Tweenity, another flytrap, and in the next to *that*, more snowflakes, and so on. Then you bring them to Earth-normal simultaneously—"

"And they combine!" marveled Carbo. "Into a snowtrap!"

"Well— Not exactly," said Franck. "The first batch blew up."

"Blew up? Why?!"

"Because I forgot the basic law of physics that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. It was the flytrap in *our* Earth that did the damage: I forgot that Earth-normal objects contain the *entire range* of 'undecided' matter. There was no room for the incoming Tweenity-objects to fit."

"So how *did* you get the snowtraps, then?"

"The same way, only skipping the Earth-normal addition. They combined beautifully, into a flying flytrap. I bred this—I like your name for it—snowtrap carefully, and when it was healthy enough to survive outside the laboratory, I gave it its freedom. You see the result: Not only do we have a flytrap which can withstand a cold climate (since it is made of snow-cells), we also have an additional weapon against insects. Cold. They hate colds as much as flytraps."

"So how soon can you get these snowtraps into all the Tweenity zones?" asked Carbo, breathlessly.

"As soon as people care to take them, Mister President. Just have them gather up some unmelted snowtraps and bring them on their next trip. They'll pollinate, multiply, and by next

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spring, when the flies emerge from their eggs, there'll be enough snowtraps around to devour everyone!"

A sickly thought struck Carbo, then, and he said, in a weak whisper, "But in springtime, the snowtraps will melt!"

"Don't worry," said Franck. "I'm working on it!"

EVEN the presidential reminder that the insect-problem would not infest Tweenity until spring did not regenerate travel in that region, except for a few diehard skiing enthusiasts, since most people preferred staying at home indoors in wintertime to sitting in a closed automobile on their own private planet. At least parking was no longer the problem it was, once everyone realized that—thanks to travel through Tweenity—automobiles could be parked in one's basement, or even an unused room of the house. So winter moved onward toward spring, Carbo bit his nails to the nubbin, and Wilhelm Franck puzzled and pondered and piddled around.

Then, just as the first robin was terrifying Malcolm Carbo from the windowsill of his office, his phone rang again, and it was an exultant Wilhelm Franck.

"Proportion!" chortled the scientist. "That is the answer. Simply by inter-Tweenity overlapping in a three-to-one ratio favoring flytraps, I have developed a snowtrap which possesses the tropic-loving propensities of the plant rather than the heat-hating consistency of the flake!"

"But—" said Carbo, "in that case, won't the snowtrap be too heavy to generate itself in the sky?"

"Yes," said Franck, "but I am working on it!"

* * *

A few unseasonable snowtrap-storms in the Tweenity management to undercut the bug-population to a comfortable level, fortunately for Malcolm Carbo, so it was not until the middle of May that once again the people began to complain about the chitinous curse again. But by then, Wilhelm had already arrived at a solution: Helium.

"Just a shift in ratio," he told Carbo. "Three Tweenities of flytrap to one of snowflake and one of helium gas. The weight-reduction should suffice to enable sky-breeding again."

"But the container—" protested Carbo. "Won't the container that holds the helium in place be also incorporated into the new snowtrap?"

"I thought of that," Franck said happily, "and overcame it with ease. I simply used frozen helium, and in that way, needed no container."

"Hold on—" gasped Carbo. "What happens when the frozen

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helium turns into gas again, inside the cells of the snowtrap, Franck?! I should think the pressures would burst the thing to bits!"

"Good thinking!" enthused Wilhelm. "You should have been a scientist! For that is exactly what *did* happen. But I overcame even that: I added, to the three-one-one creation, one more constituent: Rubber. Now the cells can expand freely when the gas inflates them."

"But won't that mean awfully large snowtraps?" said Carbo, gnashing his teeth in frustration.

"Sure," said Franck. "About three feet in diameter. But who cares? The bigger the snowtrap, the more flies it can hold!"

"*Finally!*" Carbo sobbed in relief. "I'll have my agents pick them up and distribute them to all the people at once!"

"Fine, fine," said Franck. "However, something that happened awhile back started me in on a new and interesting theory: You remember how the first snow-trap blew up when I used an Earth-normal constituent? Well, I began to realize that—"

"Please!" Carbo interrupted. "Some other time! I've got to make the people happy before I get lynched."

He hung up the phone and dialled the number of his governmental distribution office. Within a week, the people were happy again, trips to Tweenity reached an all-time high of 98% of the population, and warehouse-, store- and orchard-owners gave up on any chance of stopping the relentless depletion of their properties, and satisfied themselves by starting to rob the homes of the absent Tweenity-travelers, as long as there were no longer any law-enforcement agencies.

AT first, quite a few people tried actually moving permanently into their respective Tweenities, but once it was found that there were no longer people like carpenters, architects, or plumbers available, they decided to settle for nice long sojourns, instead. Most of them found that robbery was a tiresome business, and contented themselves with bringing their own seeds, cuttings, livestock, and saplings into their own personal Tweenity, to survive on during the happy, devil-may-care vacation of the entire summer and most of the fall. Farming—ordinarily an arduous task even for an expert—was found to be fantastically simple in the Tweenity-regions. There were no crows to eat the seedling corn, no beetles (thanks to the ubiquitous snowtraps, which bobbed about the sky like friendly clouds-turned-watchdog) to wreck the vegetable crop,

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no end of grazing land for the livestock, and (most important of all) no worries about failure, since a bad break in the agricultural schemes of any Tweenity-dweller (hailstorms, hoof-and-mouth disease, flood, or drought) could be left behind while the would-be farmers came back to Earth-normal until the danger was past.

However, toward the end of this long leisure, a few people began to wonder about the generators. True, they were simple to power—if one had batteries. Simple to build—if one had metalworking skill. But no one was manufacturing batteries anymore (or anything else, for that matter), and you could have counted on the toes of one foot the number of men who could find metal ores, smelt them, process them into iron magnetic-cores and precision copper windings, *and* have the knowhow to find that proper trillionth-of-the-electromagnet adjustment of the third pole to get the people back into their old Tweenity again. But there were still plenty of batteries to go around, and lots of iron- or copper-scraps to work with, so even the ones who thought about it didn't begin to worry about it. Which was, as things turned out, awfully unfortunate for an awful lot of people.

Shortly after the first frost in November, the happy travelers came home, and a great number of horrible things began to happen, within a few hours of each returnee's appearance at Earth-normal:

1) Irving Fletcher, of the Bronx, attempted to bite into a banana he'd left behind in his refrigerator, and shattered his front teeth to powder.

2) Harvey Millikin of El Paso, attempting to lift a fallen twig from his front porch step, on his way into the house, gave himself a painful hernia when the twig would not budge.

3) Miss Lorelei Custis, of St. Petersburg, who had materialized inside her livingroom, found that she could neither get out of her house nor lift the phone to call for assistance with suddenly stubborn doors and windows.

4) Edward Vargas, of Newport, tripped getting out of his car and fell into the Sound, where he lay, shocked speechless, on the surface of choppy grey water which refused to engulf him.

5) Mrs. Letitia Fortesque, of Ann Arbor, was eaten by her cat.

THIS time, the reports reached Carbo by hearsay, since none of the victims (approximately 90% of the Tweenity-travelers) were in a position to come in person, phone, or even lift a pencil to notepaper. Terrified by the uneasy rumors filtering in by means of curious neighbors, an-

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xious relatives, or just plain snoops, Carbo got Wilhelm Franck on the phone at once.

"What's *happened* to those people!?" he demanded. "None of them can turn a doorknob, stand up in a breeze, or even chew a piece of gum!"

"They've deteriorated, I'm afraid," Franck sighed sadly. "It ties in nicely with the theory I was trying to propound the last time you hung up on me."

"Theory—?" choked Carbo, with a guilty start, as full recollection of his bad manners came to his mind. "Oh, yes, you were saying something about the reason your first snowtrap blew up, as I recall . . ."

"Yes," said Wilhelm Franck. "You have a good memory, Mister President. Not many men would remember in such detail an event of so short a duration—"

"Forget the compliments and *explain*!" Carbo roared.

"Well, it's this way," said Franck. "That first snowtrap blew up because the Earth-normal flytrap contained in itself all the 'undecided' matter it could hold, right?"

"Right," muttered Carbo, fidgeting. "But—"

"So I theorized that—if a person stayed too long in any given Tweenity region, eating only that region's available nourishment, that his 'series' of mutually incorporated 'selves', excepting the self of that particular Tweenity, would starve to death, and leave him with—as it were—just a *shell* of his former composition. He would weigh only one-trillionth what he once weighed, have only one-trillionth the strength, and so on, and so on. That is, in Earth-normal. In his own Tweenity, he would be perfectly all right."

"But—That's *ghastly*!" cried Carbo. "How can you be so calm? Don't you know how terrible this is?"

"It's not so terrible as it's going to get," said Franck. "I have also another theory."

"I'm afraid to *hear* it . . ." moaned the President.

"Okay," said Wilhelm, and hung up.

Carbo screamed like a wounded animal, and dialed the now-all-too-familiar number again. "Franck!" he shrieked. "Don't hang up again. Your theory—What is it? I've got to warn people."

"Okay," said the scientist. "Just make sure that nobody bumps into anybody or anything from a different Tweenity."

"What will happen if they do?" Carbo almost whispered, some unlucky part of his mind giving him a glimmer of the worst. "When a person meets an alien Tweenity-thing, I mean?"

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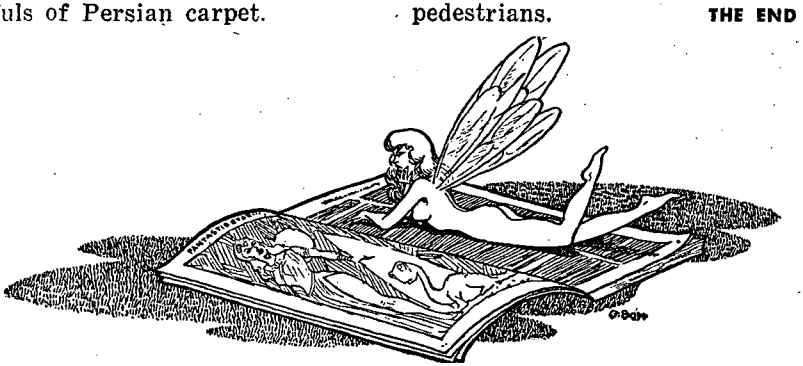
"They'll combine," said Franck. "Like the snow flakes, fly traps, helium and rubber. 'Undecided' matter is a highly affinitive thing. It tends to seek out other 'undecided' matter and unite with it, trying to become a *whole* of positive or negative matter. Nature, as usual, abhors any incompleteness."

"But there are all *kinds* of alien Tweenities around!" said Carbo, trembling. "Plants, animals, and people! And no two people are *from* the same Tweenity!"

"Unless they're relatives or friends who went along," Franck pointed out.

"If you're trying to ease the blow, you've failed!" raged Carbo, not only hanging up but also wrenching the telephone cord right out of the wall. When his advisors found him, he was seated in the center of the room, mumbling, "Keep away! Don't touch! Hands off!", and then giggling between hearty mouthfuls of Persian carpet.

So the warning was not given, and it probably would have done little good, anyhow. Little by little, people bumped into other people, and became two-trillionth single persons, to the chagrin of both. But most, unluckily, thanks to the preponderance of insects which had come back from Tweenity with the travelers (probably to escape the snowtraps) found themselves gradually assuming the aspect of the bugs they had so detested in the first place. Some semblance to humanity prevailed, of course, since it took a heap of flyweights to make a man a complete bug, but most of the surviving population became small, hairless, six-armed creatures, with lousy coordination of the limbs, and hence easy prey for the hungry snowtraps (who eventually took the hapless people to be some new mutation of pink-skinned fleas), and after the unusually bitter winter of that year, there was no one left in the world but pedestrians. **THE END**



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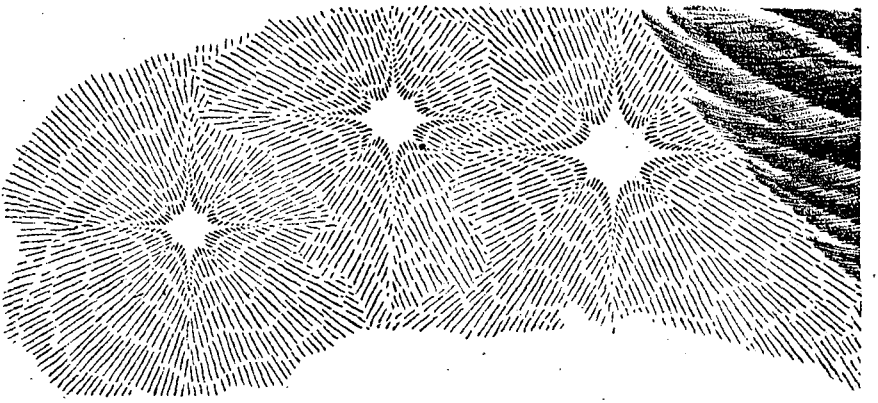

He That Hath Wings

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

THE most famous story of men with wings, the legend of Daedalus and Icarus *is set in a period roughly 2,000 years Before Christ. While not the first such tale, it is certainly the most universally known.*

Wings have always symbolized man's highest aspirations. It is no accident that in describing the "angel" hosts in the service of the Lord, the writers of The Holy Scriptures *invested them with glorious white wings. For to fly was to come exultantly closer to God, therefore every science fiction tale of men with wings carries with it a strong element of allegory, regardless of the author's intent.*

The most popular stories of winged humans in the early science fiction magazines were written by Leslie F. Stone (Mrs. William Silberberg), two long novelets Men With Wings (AIR WONDER STORIES, *July, 1929*) *and its sequel* Women With Wings (AIR WONDER STORIES, *May, 1930.*) *Olaf Stapeldon foresaw an era of great achievement and happiness when the human race after mi-*

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Illustrator FINLAY

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grating to Venus, evolves wings and soars in spirit to undreamed heights, in his great novel Last and First Men (*1931*).

In all of these stories the ability to fly betokened a new freedom. This theme was poignantly presented by other famous writers: David H. Keller's The Flying Fool (AMAZING STORIES, *July, 1929*); *Paul Ernst's* To Heaven Standing Up (ARGOSY, *April, 1941*); *Henry Kuttner's touching fantasy,* Pegasus (FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES, *May-June, 1940*).

To my mind, however, the most beautiful and logical science fiction allegory of a man able to fly is He That Hath Wings *by Edmond Hamilton, originally published in the July, 1938 issue of* WEIRD TALES. *Of the hundreds of stories Edmond Hamilton has written, this is one of his two or three favorites and after reading this sensitive and moving story it will become one of yours.*

DOCTOR HARRIMAN paused in the corridor of the maternity ward and asked, "What about that woman in 27?"

There was pity in the eyes of the plump, crisply dressed head nurse as she answered. "She died an hour after the birth of her baby, doctor. Her heart was bad, you know."

The physician nodded, his spare, cleanshaven face thoughtful. "Yes, I remember now—she and her husband were injured in an electrical explosion in a subway a year ago, and the husband died recently. What about the baby?"

The nurse hesitated. "A fine, healthy little boy, except—"

"Except what?"

"Except that he is humpbacked doctor."

Doctor Harriman swore in pity "What horrible luck for the poor little devil! Born an orphan, and deformed, too." He said with sudden decision, "I'll look at the infant. Perhaps we could do something for him."

But when he and the nurse bent together over the crib in which red-faced little David Rand lay squalling lustily, the doctor shook his head. "No, we can't do anything for that back. What a shame!"

David Rand's little red body was as straight and clean-lined as that of any baby ever born—except for his back. From the back of the infant's shoulder-blades jutted two humped projections, one on each side, that curved down toward the lower ribs.

Those twin humps were so long and streamlined in their jutting curve that they hardly looked like deformities. The skilful

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hands of Doctor Harriman gently probed them. Then an expression of perplexity came over his face.

"This doesn't seem any ordinary deformity," he said puzzledly. "I think we'll look at them through the X-ray. Tell Doctor Morris to get the apparatus going."

Doctor Morris was a stocky, redheaded young man who looked in pity, also, at the crying, red-faced baby lying in front of the X-ray machine, later.

He muttered, "Tough on the poor kid, that back. Ready, doctor?"

Harriman nodded. "Go ahead."

The X-rays broke into sputtering, crackling life. Doctor Harriman applied his eyes to the fluoroscope. His body stiffened. It was a long, silent minute before he straightened from his inspection. His spare face had gone dead white and the waiting nurse wondered what had so excited him.

Harriman said, a little thickly, "Morris! Take a look through this. I'm either seeing things, or else something utterly unprecedented has happened."

Morris, with a puzzled frown at his superior, gazed through the instrument. His head jerked up.

"My God!" he exclaimed.

"You see it too. "Then I guess I'm not crazy after all. But this —why, it's without precedent in all human history!"

HE babbled incoherently, "And the bones, too—hollow—the whole skeletonal structure different. His weight—"

He set the infant hastily on a scale. The beam jiggled.

"See that!" exclaimed Harriman. "He weighs only a third of what a baby his size should weigh."

Red-headed young Doctor Morris was staring in fascination at the curving humps on the infant's back. He said hoarsely. "But, this just isn't possible—"

"But it's real!" Harriman flung out. His eyes were brilliant with excitement. He cried, "A change in gene-patterns—only that could have caused this. Some pre-natal influence—"

His fist smacked into his hand. "I've got it! The electrical explosion that injured this child's mother a year before his birth. That's what did it—an explosion of hard radiations that damaged, changed, her genes. You remember Muller's experiments—"

The head nurse's wonder overcame her respect. She asked, "But what is it, doctor? What's the matter with the child's back? Is it so bad as all that?"

"So bad?" repeated Doctor Harriman. He drew a long breath. He told the nurse, "This child, this David Rand, is a unique case in medical history. There has never been anyone like him—as far as we know, the thing that's going

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to happen to him has never happened to any other human being. And all due to that electrical explosion."

"What's going to happen to him?" demanded the nurse, dismayed.

"This child is going to have *wings!*" shouted Harriman. "Those projections growing out on his back—they're not just ordinary abnormalities—they're nascent wings, that will very soon break out and grow just as a fledgling bird's wings break out and grow."

THE head nurse stared at them. "You're joking," she said finally, in flat unbelief.

"Good God, do you think I'd joke about such a matter?" cried Harriman. "I tell you, I'm as stunned as you are, even though I can see the scientific reason for the thing. This child's body is different from the body of any other human being that ever lived.

"His bones are hollow, like a bird's bones. His blood seems different and he weighs only a third what a normal human infant weighs. And his shoulderblades jut out into bone projections to which are attached the great wing-muscles. The X-rays clearly show the rudimentary feathers and bones of the wings themselves."

"Wings!" repeated young Morris dazedly. He said after a moment, "Harriman, this child will be able to—"

"He'll be able to fly, yes!" declared Harriman. "I'm certain of it. The wings are going to be very large ones, and his body is so much lighter than normal that they'll easily bear him aloft."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Morris incoherently.

He looked a little wildly down at the infant. It had stopped crying and now waved pudgy red arms and legs weakly.

"It just isn't possible," said the nurse, taking refuge in incredulity. "How could a baby, a man, have wings?"

Doctor Harriman said swiftly, "It's due to a deep change in the parents' genes. The genes, you know, are the tiny cells which control bodily development in every living thing that is born. Alter the gene-pattern and you alter the bodily development of the offspring, which explains the differences in color, size, and so forth, in children. But those minor differences are due to comparatively minor gene-changes.

"But the gene-pattern of this child's parents was radically changed a year ago. The electrical explosion in which they were injured must have deeply altered their gene-patterns, by a wave of sudden electrical force. Muller, of the University of Texas, has demonstrated that gene-patterns *can* be greatly altered by

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radiation, and that the offspring of parents so treated will differ greatly from their parents in bodily form. That accident produced an entirely new gene-pattern in the parents of this child, one which developed their child into a winged human. He's what biologists technically call a mutant."

Young Morris suddenly said, "Good Lord, what the newspapers are going to do when they gte hold of this story!"

"They mustn't get hold of it," Doctor Harriman declared. "The birth of this child is one of the greatest things in the history of biological science, and it mustn't be made a cheap popular sensation. We must keep it utterly quiet."

THEY kept it quiet for three months, in all. During that time, little David Rand occupied a private room in the hospital and was cared for only by the head nurse and visited only by the two physicians.

During those three months, the correctness of Doctor Harriman' prediction was fulfilled. For in that time, the humped projection on the child's back grew with incredible rapidity until at last they broke through the tender skin in a pair of stubby, scrawny-looking things that were unmistakably wings.

Little David squalled violently during the days that his wings broke forth, feeling only a pain as of teething many times intensified. But the two doctors stared and stared at those little wings with their rudimentary feathers, even now hardly able to believe the witness of their eyes.

They saw that the child had as complete control of the wings as of his arms and legs, by means of the great muscles around their bases which no other human possessed. And they saw too that while David's weight was increasing, he remained still just a third of the weight of a normal child of his age, and that his heart had a tremendously high pulse-beat and that his blood was far warmer than that of any normal person.

Then it happened. The head nurse, unable any longer to contain the tremendous secret with which she was bursting, told a relative in strict confidence. That relative told another relative, also in strict confidence. And two days later the story appeared in the New York newspapers.

The hospital put guards at its doors and refused admittance to the grinning reporters who came to ask for details. All of them were frankly skeptical, and the newspaper stories were written with a tongue in the cheek. The public laughed. A child with wings! What kind of phony new story would they think up next?

But a few days later, the stories

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changed in tone. Others of the hospital personnel, made curious by the newspaper yarns, pried into the room where David Rand lay crowing and thrashing his arms and legs and wings. They babbled broadcast assertions that the story was true. One of them who was a candid camera enthusiast even managed to slip out a photograph of the infant. Smeary as it was, that photograph did unmistakably show a child with wings of some sort growing from its back.

THE hospital became a fort, a place besieged. Reporters and photographers milled outside its doors and clamored against the special police guard that had been detailed to keep them out. The great press associations offered Doctor Harriman large sums for exclusive stories and photographs of the winged child. The public began to wonder if there was anything in the yarn.

Doctor Harriman had to give in, finally. He admitted a committee of a dozen reporters, photographers and eminent physicians to see the child.

David Rand lay and looked up at them with wise blue gaze, clutching his toe, while the eminent physicians and newspapermen stared down at him with bulging eyes.

The physicians said, "It's incredible, but it's true. This is no fake—the child really has wings."

The reporters asked Doctor Harriman wildly, "When he gets bigger, will he be able to fly?"

Harriman said shortly, "We can't tell just what his development will be like, now. But if he continues to develop as he has, undoubtedly he'll be able to fly."

"Good Lord, let me at a phone!" groaned one newshound. And then they were all scrambling pell-mell for the telephones.

Doctor Harriman permitted a few pictures, and then unceremoniously showed the visitors out. But there was no holding the newspapers, after that. David Rand's name became overnight the best known in the world. The pictures convinced even the most skeptical of the public.

Great biologists made long statements on the theories of genetics which could explain the child. Anthropologists speculated as to whether similar freak winged men had not been born a few times in the remote past, giving rise to the worldwide legends of harpies and vampires and flying people. Crazy sects saw in the child's birth an omen of the approaching end of the world.

Theatrical agents offered immense sums for the privilege of exhibiting David in a hygienic glass case. Newspapers and press services outbid each other for exclusive rights to the story Doctor

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Harriman could tell. A thousand firms begged to purchase the right to use little David's name on toys, infant foods, and what not.

And the cause of all this excitement lay and rolled and crowed and sometimes cried in his little bed, now and then vigorously flapping the sprouting wings that had upset the whole world. Doctor Harriman looked thoughtfully down at him.

He said, "I'll have to get him out of here. The hospital superintendent is complaining that the crowds and commotion are wrecking the place."

"But where can you take him? Morris wanted to know. "He hasn't any parents or relatives, and you can't put a kid like this in an orphan asylum."

Doctor Harriman made decision. "I'm going to retire from practise and devote myself entirely to observing and recording David's growth. I'll have myself made his legal guardian and I'll bring him up in some spot away from all this turmoil—an island or some place like that, if I can find one."

Harriman found such a place, an island off the Maine coast, a speck of barren sand and scrubby trees. He leased it, built a bungalow there, and took David Rand and an elderly nurse-housekeeper there. He took also a strong Norwegian watchman who was very efficient at repelling the boats of reporters who tried to land there. After a while the newspapers gave it up. They had to be content to reprint the photographs and articles which Doctor Harriman gave to scientific publications concerning David's growth.

DAVID grew rapidly. In five years he was a sturdy little youngster with yellow hair, and his wings were larger and covered with short bronze feathers. He ran and laughed and played, like any youngster, flapping his wings vigorously.

He was ten before he flew. By then he was a little slimmer, and his glittering bronze wings came to his heels. When he walked or sat or slept, he kept the wings closely folded on his back like a bronze sheath. But when he opened them, they extended much farther than his arms could, on either side.

Doctor Harriman had meant to let David gradually try flying, to photograph and observe every step of the process. But it did not happen that way. David flew first as naturally as a bird first flies.

He himself had never thought much about his wings. He knew that Doctor John, as he called the physician, had no such wings, and that neither did Flora, the gaunt old nurse, nor Holf, the grinning watchman, have them.

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But he had seen no other people, and so he imagined the rest of the world was divided into people who had wings and people who didn't have them. He did not know just what the wings were for, though he knew that he liked to flap them and exercise them when he was running, and would wear no shirt over them.

Then one April morning, David found out what his wings were for. He had climbed into a tall old scrub oak to peer at a bird's nest. The child was always inordinately interested in the birds of the little island, jumping and clapping his hands as he saw them darting and circling overhead, watching their flocks stream south each fall and north each spring, prying into their ways of living because of some dim sense of kinship with these other winged things.

He had climbed nearly to the top of the old oak on this morning, toward the nest he had spied. His wings were tightly folded to keep them out of the way of branches. Then, as he reached up to pull himself the last step upward, his foot pressed on the merest rotten shell of a dead branch. Abnormally light as he was, his weight was enough to snap the branch and he fell cleanly toward the ground.

Instincts exploded in David's brain in the moment that he plummeted toward the ground. Quite without will, his wings unfolded with a bursting whir. He felt a terrific tug on them that wrenched his shoulders hard. And then suddenly, marvelously, he was no longer falling but was *gliding* downward on a long slant, with his wings unfolded and rigidly set.

There burst from his innermost being a high, ringing shout of exultation. Down—down—gliding like a swooping bird with the clean air buffeting at his face and streaming past his wings and body. A wild, sweet thrill that he had never felt before, a sudden crazy joy in living.

He shouted again, and with instant impulse flapped his great wings, beating the air with them, instinctively bending his head sharply back and keeping his arms flattened against his sides, his legs straight and close together.

He was soaring *upward* now, the ground swiftly receding beneath him, the sun glazing in his eyes, the wind screaming around him. He opened his mouth to shout again, and the cold, clean air hammered into his throat. In sheer, mad physical ecstasy he rocketed up through the blue with whirring wings.

It was thus that Doctor Harriman saw him when he chanced to come out of the bungalow a little later. The doctor heard a shrill, exultant cry from high

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above and looked up to see that slim winged shape swooping down toward him from the sunlit heavens.

The doctor caught his breath at the sheer beauty of the spectacle as David dived and soared and whirled above him, gone crazy with delight in his newfound wings. The boy had instinctively learned how to turn and twist and dive, even though his movements had yet a clumsiness that made him sometimes side-slip.

When David Rand finally swooped down and alighted in front of the doctor with quick-closing wings, the boy's eyes streamed electric joy.

"I can *fly!*"

Doctor Harriman nodded. "You can fly, David. I know I can't keep you from doing it now, but you must not leave the island and you must be careful."

BY the time David reached the age of seventeen, there was no longer any need to caution him to be careful. He was as much at home in the air as any bird living.

He was a tall, slim, yellow-haired youth now, his arrow-straight figure still clad only in the shorts that were all the clothing his warm-blooded body required, a wild, restless energy crackling and snapping in his keen face and dancing blue eyes.

His wings had become superb, glittering, bronze-feathered pinions that extended more than ten feet from tip to tip when he spread them, and that touched his heels with their lowest feathers when he closed them on his back.

Constant flying over the island and the surrounding waters had developed the great wing-muscles behind David's shoulders to tremendous strength and endurance. He could spend a whole day gliding and soaring over the island, now climbing high with mad burst of whirring wings, then circling, planing on motionless wings, slowly descending.

He could chase and overtake almost any bird in the air. He would start up a flock of pheasants and his laughter would ring high and wild across the sky as he turned and twisted and darted after the panicky birds. He could pull out the tail-feathers of outraged hawks before they could escape, and he could swoop quicker than hawk on rabbits and squirrels on the ground.

Sometimes when fog banked the island Doctor Harriman would hear the ringing shout from the gray mists overhead and would know that David was somewhere up there. Or again he would be out over the sunlit waters, plummeting headlong down to them and then at the last moment swiftly spreading his

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wings so that he just skimmed the wave-crests with the screaming gulls before he rocketed upward again.

Never yet had David been away from the island, but the doctor knew from his own infrequent visits to the mainland that the world-wide interest in the flying youth was still strong. The photographs which the doctor gave to scientific journals no longer sufficed for the public curiosity, and launches and airplanes with moving-picture cameramen frequently circled the island to snap pictures of David Rand flying.

To one of those airplanes occurred a thing that gave its occupants much to talk about for days to come. They were a pilot and cameraman who came over the island at midday, in spite of Doctor Harriman's prohibition of such flights, and who circled brazenly about looking for the flying youth.

Had they looked up, they could have seen David as a circling speck high above them. He watched the airplane with keen interest mixed with contempt. He had seen these flying ships before and he felt only pity and scorn for their stiff, clumsy wings and noisy motors with which wingless men made shift to fly. This one, though, so directly beneath him, stimulated his curiosity so that he swooped down toward it from above and behind, his great wings urging him against the slip-stream of its propeller.

THE pilot in the open rear-cockpit of that airplane nearly had heart failure when someone tapped him on the shoulder from behind. He whirled, startled, and when he saw David Rand crouching precariously on the fuselage just behind him, grinning at him, he lost his head for a moment so that the ship sideslipped and started to fall.

With a shouting laugh, David Rand leaped off the fuselage and spread his wings to soar up past it. The pilot recovered enough presence of mind to right his ship, and presently David saw it move unsteadily off toward the mainland. Its occupants had enough of the business for one day.

But the increasing number of such curious visitors stimulated in David Rand a reciprocal curiosity concerning the outside world. He wondered more and more what lay beyond the low, dim line of the mainland over there across the blue waters. He could not understand why Doctor John forbade him to fly over there, when well he knew that his wings would bear him up for a hundred times that distance.

Doctor Harriman told him, "I'll take you there soon, David.

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But you must wait until you understand things better—you wouldn't fit in with the rest of the world yet."

"Why not?"

The doctor explained, "You have wings, and no one else in the world has. That might make things very difficult for you."

"But why?"

Harriman stroked his spare chin and said thoughtfully, "You'd be a sensation, a sort of freak, David. They'd be curious about you because you're different, but they'd look down on you for the same reason. That's why I brought you up out here, to avoid that. You must wait a little longer before you see the world."

David Rand flung a hand up to point half angrily at a streaming flock of piping wild birds, heading south, black against the autumn sunset. "*They* don't wait! Every fall I see them, everything that flies, going away. Every spring I see them returning, passing overhead again. And I have to stay on this little island!"

A wild pulse of freedom surged in his blue eyes.

"I want to go as they do, to see the land over there, and the lands beyond that."

"Soon you shall go over there," promised Doctor Harriman. "I will go with you—will look out for you there."

But through the dusk that evening, David sat with chin in hand, wings folded, staring broodingly after the straggling, southing birds. And in the days that followed, he took less and less pleasure in mere aimless flight above the island, and more and more watched wistfully the endless, merry passage of the honking wild geese and swarming ducks and whistling songbirds.

Doctor Harriman saw and understood that yearning in David's eyes, and the old physician sighed.

"He has grown up," he thought, "and wants to go like any young bird that would leave its nest. I shall not be able much longer to keep him from leaving."

But it was Harriman himself who left first, in a different way. For some time the doctor's heart had troubled him, and there came a morning when he did not awaken, and when a dazed, uncomprehending David stared down at his guardian's still white face.

Through all that day, while the old housekeeper wept softly about the place and the Norwegian was gone in the boat to the mainland to arrange the funeral, David Rand sat with folded wings and chin in hand, staring out across the blue waters.

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THAT night, when all was dark and silent around the bungalow, he stole into the room where the doctor lay silent and peaceful. In the darkness, David touched the thin, cold hand. Hot tears swam in his eyes and he felt a hard lump in his throat as he made that futile gesture of farewell.

Then he went softly back out of the house into the night. The moon was a red shield above the eastern waters and the autumn wind blew cold and crisp. Down through the keen air came the joyous piping and carolling and whistling of a long swarm of wild birds, like shrill bugle-calls of gay challenge.

David's knees bent, and he sprang upward with whirring wings—up and up, the icy air streaming past his body, thundering in his ears, his nostrils drinking it. And the dull sorrow in his heart receded in the bursting joy of flight and freedom. He was up among those shrilling, whistling birds now, the screaming wind tearing laughter from his lips as they scattered in alarm from him.

Then as they saw that this strange winged creature who had joined them made no move to harm them, the wild birds reformed their scattered flock. Far off across the dim, heaving plain of the waters glowed the dull red moon and the scattered lights of the mainland, the little lights of earthbound folk. The birds shrilled loud and David laughed and sang in joyous chorus as his great wings whirred in time with their own, trailing high across the night sky toward adventure and freedom, flying south.

All through that night, and with brief rests through the next day also, David flew southward, for a time over endless waters and then over the green, fertile land. His hunger he satisfied by dipping toward trees loaded with ripening fruit. When the next night came he slept in a crotch high in a tall forest oak, crouched comfortably with his wings folded about him.

It was not long before the world learned that the freak youth with wings was abroad. People in farms and villages and cities looked up incredulously at that slim figure winging high overhead. Ignorant Negroes who had never heard of David Rand flung themselves prostrate in panic as he passed across the sky.

Through all that winter there were reports of David from the southland, reports that made it evident he had become almost completely a creature of the wild. What greater pleasure than to soar through the long sun-drenched days over the blue tropic seas, to swoop on the silver fish that broke from the wa-

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ters, to gather strange fruits and sleep at night in a high tree close against the stars, and wake with dawn to another day of unfettered freedom?

Now and again he would circle unsuspected over some city at night, soaring slowly in the darkness and peering down curiously at the vast pattern of straggling lights and the blazing streets choked with swarms of people and vehicles. He would not enter those cities and he could not see how the people in them could bear to live so, crawling over the surface of the earth amid the rubbing and jostling of hordes like them, never knowing even for a moment the wild clean joy of soaring through blue infinities of sky. What could make life worthwhile for such earth-bound, ant-like folk?

When the spring sun grew hotter and higher, and the birds began to flock together in noisy swarms, David too felt something tugging him northward. So he flew north over the spring-green land, great bronzed wings tirelessly beating the air, a slim, tanned figure arrowing unerringly north.

He came at last to his goal, the island where he had lived most of his life. It lay lonely and deserted now in the empty waters, dust gathering over the things in the abandoned bungalow, the garden weed-grown. David settled down there for a time, sleeping upon the porch, making long flights for amusement, west over the villages and dingy cities, north over the rugged, wave-dashed coast, east over the blue sea; until at last the flowers began to die and the air grew frosty, and the deep urge tugged at David until again he joined the great flocks of winged things going south.

North and south—south and north—for three years that wild freedom of unchecked migration was his. In those three years he came to know mountain and valley, sea and river, storm and calm, and hunger and thirst, as only they of the wild know them. And in those years the world became accustomed to David, almost forgot him. He was the winged man, just a freak; there would never be another like him.

THEN in the third spring there came the end to David Rand's winged freedom. He was on his spring flight north, and at dusk felt hunger. He made out in the twilight a suburban mansion amid extensive orchards and gardens, and swooped down toward it with ideas of early berries. He was very near the trees in the twilight when a gun roared from the ground. David felt a blinding stab of pain through his head, and knew nothing more.

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When he awoke, it was in a bed in a sunlit room. There were a kind-faced elderly man and a girl in the room, and another man who looked like a doctor. David discovered that there was a bandage around his head. These people, he saw, were all looking at him with intense interest.

The elderly, kind-looking man said, "You're David Rand, the fellow with wings? Well, you're mighty lucky to be living." He explained, "You see, my gardener has been watching for a hawk that steals our chickens. When you swooped down in the dusk last night, he fired at you before he could recognize you. Some of the shot from his gun just grazed your head."

The girl asked gently, "Are you feeling better now? The doctor says you'll soon be as good as ever." She added, "This is my father, Wilson Hall. I'm Ruth Hall."

David stared up at her. He thought he had never seen anyone so beautiful as this shy, soft, dark girl with her curling black hair and tender, worried brown eyes.

He suddenly knew the reason for the puzzling persistence with which the birds sought each other out and clung together in pairs, each mating season. He felt the same thing in his own breast now, the urge toward this girl. He did not think of it as love, but suddenly he loved her.

He told Ruth Hall slowly, "I'm all right now."

But she said, "You must stay here until you're completely well. It's the least we can do when it was our servant who almost killed you."

David stayed, as the wound healed. He did not like the house, whose rooms seemed so dark and stiflingly close to him, but he found that he could stay outside during the day, and could sleep on a porch at night.

Neither did he like the newspaper men and cameramen who came to Wilson Hall's house to get stories about the winged man's accident; but these soon ceased coming, for David Rand was not now the sensation he had been years ago. And while visitors to the Hall home stared rather disconcertingly at him and at his wings, he got used to that.

He put up with everything, so that he might be near Ruth Hall. His love for her was a clean fire burning inside him and nothing in the world now seemed so desirable as that she should love him too. Yet because he was still mostly of the wild, and had had little experience in talking, he found it hard to tell her what he felt.

He did tell her, finally, sitting beside her in the sunlit garden.

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When he had finished, Ruth's gentle brown eyes were troubled.

"You want me to marry you, David?"

"Why, yes," he said, a little puzzled. "That's what they call it when people mate, isn't it? And I want you for my mate."

She said, distressed, "But David, your wings——"

He laughed. "Why, there's nothing the matter with my wings. The accident didn't hurt them. See!"

And he leaped to his feet, whipping open the great bronze wings that glittred in the sunlight, looking like a figure of fable poised for a leap into the blue, his slim tanned body clad only in the shorts which were all the clothing he would wear.

The trouble did not leave Ruth's eyes. She explained, "It's not that, David—it's that your wings make you so different from everybody else. Of course it's wonderful that you can fly, but they make you so different from everyone else that people look on you as a kind of freak."

David stared. "*You* don't look on me as that, Ruth?"

"Of course not," Ruth said. "But it does seem somehow a little abnormal, monstrous, your having wings."

"Monstrous?" he repeated. "Why, it's nothing like that. It's just—beautiful being able to fly. See!"

And he sprang upward with great wings whirring—up and up, climbing into the blue sky, dipping and darting and turning up there like a swallow, then cometing down in a breathless swoop to land lightly on his toes beside the girl.

"Is there anything monstrous about that?" he demanded joyously. "Why, Ruth, I want you to fly with me, held in my arms, so that you'll know the beauty of it as I know it."

The girl shuddered a little. "I couldn't, David. I know it's silly, but when I see you in the air like that you don't seem so much a man as a bird, a flying animal, something unhuman."

David Rand stared at her, suddenly miserable. "Then you won't marry me—because of my wings?"

He grasped her in his strong, tanned arms, his lips seeking her soft mouth.

"Ruth, I can't live without you now that I've met you. I can't!"

IT was a night a little later that Ruth, somewhat hesitantly, made her suggestion. The moon flooded the garden with calm silver, gleamed on David Rand's folded wings as he sat with keen young face bent eagerly toward the girl.

She said, "David, there is a way in which we could marry and be happy, if you love me enough.

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"I'll do anything!" he cried. "You know that."

She hesitated.

"Your wings—they're what keep us apart. I can't have a husband who belongs more to the wild creatures than to the human race, a husband whom everyone would consider a freak, a deformed oddity. But if you were to have your wings taken off——"

He stared at her. "My wings taken off?"

SHE explained in an eager little rush of words. "It's quite practicable, David. Doctor White, who treated you for that wound and who examined you then, has told me that it would be quite easy to amputate your wings above their bases. There would be no danger at all in it, and it would leave only the slight projection of the stumps on your back. Then you'd be a normal man and not a freak," she added, her soft face earnest and appealing. "Father would give you a position in his business, and instead of an abnormal, roaming, half-human creature you would be like—like everyone else. We could be so happy then."

David Rand was stunned. "Amputate my wings?" he repeated almost uncomprehendingly. "You won't marry me unless I do that?"

"I can't," said Ruth painfully. "I love you, David, I do—but I want my husband to be like other women's husbands."

"Never to fly again," said David slowly, his face white in the moonlight. "To become earthbound, like everyone else! No!" he cried, springing to his feet in a wild revulsion. "I won't do it—I won't give up my wings! I won't become like——"

He stopped abruptly. Ruth was sobbing into her hands. All his anger gone, he stooped beside her, pulled down her hands, yearningly tilted up her soft, tear-stained face.

"Don't cry, Ruth," he begged. "It isn't that I don't love you—I do, more than anything else on earth. But I had never thought of giving up my wings—the idea stunned me." He told her, "You go on into the house. I must think it over a little."

She kissed him, her mouth quivering and then was gone through the moonlight to the house. And David Rand remained, his brain in turmoil, pacing nervously in the silver light.

Give up his wings? Never again to dip and soar and swoop with the winged things of the sky, never again to know the mad exaltation and tameless freedom of rushing flight?

Yet—to give up Ruth—to deny this blind, irresistible yearning

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for her that beat in every atom of him—to know bitter loneliness and longing for her the rest of his life—how could he do that? He couldn't do it. He *wouldn't*.

So David went rapidly toward the house and met the girl waiting for him on the moonlit terrace.

"David?"

"Yes, Ruth, I'll do it. I'll do anything for you."

She sobbed happily on his breast. "I knew you really loved me, David. I knew it."

Two days later David Rand came out of the mists of anesthesia in a hospital room, feeling very strange, his back an aching soreness. Doctor White and Ruth were bending over his bed.

"Well, it was a complete success, young man," said the doctor. "You'll be out of here in a few days."

Ruth's eyes were shining. "The day you leave, David, we'll be married."

When they were gone, David slowly felt his back. Only the bandaged, projecting stumps of his wings remained. He could move the great wing-muscles, but no whirring pinions answered. He felt dazed and strange, as though some most vital part of him was gone. But he clung to the thought of Ruth—of Ruth waiting for him——

And she was waiting for him, and they were married on the day he left the hospital. And in the sweetness of her love, David lost all of that strange dazed feeling, and almost forgot that once he had possessed wings and had roamed the sky a wild, winged thing.

WILSON HALL gave his daughter and son-in-law a pretty white cottage on a wooded hill near town, and made a place for David in his business and was patient with his ignorance of commercial matters. And every day David drove his car into town and worked all day in his office and drove back homeward in the dusk to sit with Ruth before their fire, her head on his shoulder.

"David, are you sorry that you did it?" Ruth would ask anxiously at first.

And he would laugh and say, "Of course not, Ruth. Having you is worth anything."

And he told himself that that was true, that he did not regret the loss of his wings. All that past time when he had flown the sky with whirring wings seemed only a strange dream and only now had he awakened to real happiness, he assured himself.

Wilson Hall told his daughter, "David's doing well down at the office. I was afraid he would always be a little wild, but he's settled down fine."

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Ruth nodded happily and said, "I knew that he would. And everyone likes him so much now."

For people who once had looked askance at Ruth's marriage now remarked that it had turned out very well after all.

"He's really quite nice. And except for the slight humps on his shoulders, you'd never think that he had been different from anyone else," they said.

So the months slipped by. In the little cottage on the wooded hill was complete happiness until there came the fall, frosting the lawn with silver each morning, stamping crazy colors on the maples.

One fall night David woke suddenly wondering what had so abruptly awakened him. Ruth was still sleeping softly with gentle breathing beside him. He could hear no sound.

Then he heard it. A far-away, ghostly whistling trailing down from the frosty sky, a remote, challenging shrilling that throbbed with a dim, wild note of pulsing freedom.

He knew what it was, instantly. He swung open the window and peered up into the night with beating heart. And up there he saw them, long, streaming files of hurtling wild birds, winging southward beneath the stars. In an instant the wild impulse to spring from the window, to rocket up after them into the clean, cold night, clamored blindly in David's heart.

Instinctively the great wing-muscles at his back tensed. But only the stumps of his wings moved beneath his pajama jacket. And suddenly he was limp, trembling, aghast at that blind surge of feeling. Why, for a moment he had wanted to go, to leave *Ruth*. The thought appalled him, was like a treachery against himself. He crept back into bed and lay, determinedly shutting his ears to that distant, joyous whistling that fled southward through the night.

THE next day he plunged determinedly into his work at the office. But all through that day he found his eyes straying to the window's blue patch of sky. And week by week thereafter, all through the long months of winter and spring, the old wild yearning grew more and more an unreasonable ache inside his heart, stronger than ever when the flying creatures came winging north in spring.

He told himself savagely, "You're a fool. You love Ruth more than anything else on earth and you have her. You don't want anything else."

And again in the sleepless night he would assure himself, "I'm a man, and I'm happy to live a normal man's life, with Ruth."

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But in his brain old memories whispered slyly, "Do you remember that first time you flew, that mad thrill of soaring upward of the first time, the first giddy whirl and swoop and glide?"

And the night wind outside the window called, "Remember how you raced with me, beneath the stars and above the sleeping world, and how you laughed and sang as your wings fought me?"

And David Rand buried his face in his pillow and muttered, "I'm *not* sorry I did it. I'm not!"

Ruth awoke and asked sleepily, "Is anything the matter, David?"

"No, dear," he told her, but when she slept again he felt the hot tears stinging his eyelids, and whispered blindly, "I'm lying to myself. I want to fly."

But from Ruth, happily occupied with his comfort and their home and their friends, he concealed all that blind, buried longing. He fought to conquer it, destroy it, but could not.

When no one else was by, he would watch with aching heart the swallows darting and diving in the sunset, or the hawk soaring high and remote in the blue, or the kingfisher's thrilling swoop. And then bitterly he would accuse himself of being a traitor to his own love for Ruth.

Then that spring Ruth shyly told him something. "David, next fall—a child of ours——"

He was startled. "Ruth, dear!" Then he asked, "You're not afraid that it might be——"

She shook her head confidently. "No. Doctor White says there is no chance that it will be born abnormal as you were. He says that the different gene-characters that caused you to be born with wings are bound to be a recessive character, not a dominant, and that there is no chance of that abnormality being inherited. Aren't you glad?"

"Of course," he said, holding her tenderly. "It's going to be wonderful."

Wilson Hall beamed at the news. "A grandchild—that's fine!" he exclaimed. "David, do you know what I'm going to do after its birth? I'm going to retire and leave you as head of the firm."

"Oh, dad!" cried Ruth, and kissed her father joyfully.

David stammered his thanks. And he told himself that this ended for good all his vague, unreasonable longings. He was going to have more than Ruth to think about now, was going to have the responsibilities of a family man. He plunged into work with new zest.

FOR a few weeks he did entirely forget that old blind yearning, in his planning for things to come. He was all over that now, he told himself.

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Then suddenly his whole being was overturned by an amazing thing. For some time the wing-stumps on David's shoulders had felt sore and painful. Also it seemed they were much larger than they had been. He took occasion to examine them in a mirror and was astounded to discover that they had grown out in two very large hump-like projections that curved downward on each side along his back.

David Rand stared and stared into the mirror, a strange surmise in his eyes. Could it be possible that——

He called on Doctor White the next day, on another pretext. But before he left he asked casually, "Doctor, I was wondering, is there any chance that my wings would ever start to grow out again?"

Doctor White said thoughtfully, "Why, I suppose there *is* a chance of it, at that. A newt can regenerate a lost limb, you know, and numerous animals have similar powers of regeneration. Of course an ordinary man cannot regenerate a lost arm or leg like that, but your body is not an ordinary one and your wings might possess some power of partial regeneration, for one time at least." He added, "You don't need to worry about it, though, David. If they start to grow out again, I can remove them again without any trouble."

David Rand thanked him and left. But day after day thereafter, he closely watched and soon saw beyond doubt that the freak of genes that had given him wings in the first place had also given him at least a partial power of regenerating them.

For the wings were growing out again, day by day. The humps on his shoulders had become very much larger, though covered by his specially tailored coats the change in them was not noticed. They broke through late that summer in wings—real wings, though small as yet. Folded under his clothing, they were not apparent.

David knew that he should go in and let the doctor amputate them before they got larger. He told himself that he did not any longer want wings—Ruth and the coming child and their future together were all that meant anything to him now.

Yet still he did not say anything to anyone; kept the growing wings concealed and closed beneath his clothing. They were poor, weak wings, compared to his first ones, as though stunted by the previous amputation. It was unlikely that he would ever be able to fly with them, he thought, even if he wanted to, which he didn't.

He told himself, though, that it would be easier to have them removed after they had attained

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their full size. Besides, he didn't want to disturb Ruth at this time by telling her that the wings had grown again. So he reassured himself, and so the weeks passed until by early October his second wings had grown to their full size, though they were stunted and pitiful compared to his first splendid pinions.

ON the first week in October, a little son was born to Ruth and David. A fine, strong-limbed little boy, without a trace of anything unusual about him. He was normal of weight, and his back was straight and smooth, and he would never have wings. And a few nights later they were all in the little cottage, admiring him.

"Isn't he beautiful?" asked Ruth, looking up with eyes shining with pride.

David nodded dumbly, his heart throbbing with emotion as he looked down at the red, sleeping mite. His son!

"He's wonderful," he said humbly. "Ruth, dear—I want to work the rest of my life for you and for him."

Wilson Hall beamed on them and chuckled, "You're going to have a chance to do that, David. What I said last spring goes. This afternoon I formally resigned as head of the firm and saw that you were named as my successor."

David tried to thank him. His heart was full with complete happiness, with love for Ruth and for their child. He felt that no one had ever been so happy.

Then after Wilson Hall had left, and Ruth was sleeping and he was alone, David suddenly realized that there was something he must do.

He told himself sternly, "All these months you've been lying to yourself, making excuses for yourself, letting your wings grow again. In your heart, all that time, you were hoping that you would be able to fly again."

He laughed. "Well, *that's* all over, now. I only told myself before that I didn't want to fly. It wasn't true, then, but it is now. I'll never again long for wings, for flying, now that I have both Ruth and the boy."

No, never again—that was ended. He would drive into town this very night and have Doctor White remove these new-grown second wings. He would never even let Ruth know about them.

Flushed with that resolve, he hurried out of the cottage into the windy darkness of the fall night. The red moon was lifting above the treetops eastward and by its dull light he started back toward the garage. All around him the trees were bending and creaking under the brawling, jovial hammering of the hard north wind.

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DAVID stopped suddenly. Down through the frosty night had come a faint, far sound that jerked his head erect. A distant, phantom whistling borne on the rushing wind, rising, falling, growing stronger and stronger—the wild birds, southing through the noisy night, shrilling their exultant challenge as the wind bore their wings onward. That wild throb of freedom that he had thought dead clutched hard of a sudden at David's heart.

He stared up into the darkness with brilliant eyes, hair blowing in the wind. To be up there with them just once again—to fly with them just one more time.

Why not? Why not fly this one last time and so satisfy that aching longing before he lost these last wings? He would not go far, would make but a short flight and then return to have the wings removed, to devote his life to Ruth and their son. No one would ever know.

Swiftly he stripped off his clothing in the darkness, stood erect, spreading the wings that had been so long concealed and confined. Quaking doubt assailed him. Could he fly at all, now? Would these poor, stunted, second wings even bear him aloft for a few minutes? No, they wouldn't—he knew they wouldn't!

The wild wind roared louder through the groaning trees, the silvery shrilling high overhead came louder. David stood poised, knees bent, wings spread for the leap upward, agony on his white face. He couldn't try it—he knew that he couldn't leave the ground.

But the wind was shouting in his ears, "You can do it, you can fly again! See, I am behind you, waiting to lift you, ready to race you up there under the stars! Try David, try."

And the exultant, whistling voices high above were shrilling, "Upward—up with us! You belong among us, not down there! Upward—fly!"

He sprang! The stunted wings smote the air wild, and he was soaring! The dark trees, the lighted window of the cottage, the whole hilltop, dropped behind and below him as his wings bore him upward on the bellowing wind.

Up, up—clean, hard battering of the cold air on his face once more, the crazy roaring of the wind around him, the great thrash of his wings bearing him higher and higher.

David Rand's high, ringing laughter pealed out on the screaming wind as he flew on between the stars and the nighted earth. Higher and higher, right up among the shrilling, southing birds that companioned him on

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either side. On and on he flew with them.

He knew suddenly that this alone was living, this alone was waking. All that other life that had been his, down there, that had been the dream, and he had awakened from it now. It was not *he* who worked in an office and had loved a woman and a child down there. It was a dream David Rand who had done that, and the dream was over now.

Southward, southward, he rushed through the night, and the wind screamed, and the moon rose higher, until at last the land passed from beneath and he flew with the flying birds over moonlit plains of ocean. He knew that it was madness to fly on with these poor wings that already were tiring and weakening, but he had no thought in his exultant brain of turning back. To fly on, to fly that one last time, that was enough!

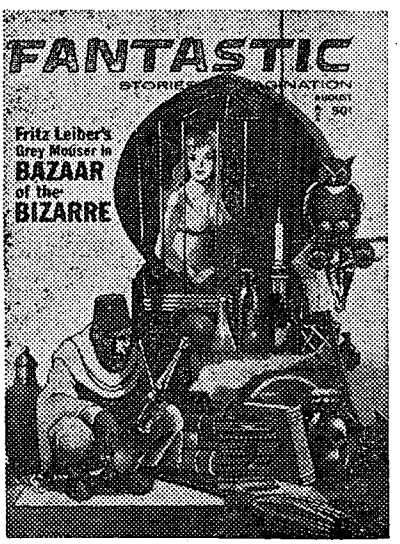
So that when his tired wings began at last to fail, and he began to sink lower and lower toward the silvered waters, there was no fear and no regret in his breast. It was what he had always expected and wanted, at the end, and he was drowsily glad—glad to be falling as all they with wings must finally fall, after a brief lifetime of wild, sweet flight, dropping contentedly to rest. **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH

Grey Mouser fans, attention! **Fritz Leiber** returns to the Land of Lankhmar in the August issue of FANTASTIC, along with Fafhrd and such assorted characters as Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes. (Those ought to get together and work out a trade.) In *The Bazaar of the Bizarre*, Leiber creates a fantasyland worthy of the Mouser saga.

Also in the next issue, **Keith Laumer's** *A Hoax In Time* comes to its roaring conclusion; and there will be a Fantasy Reprint, *The Devil in Hollywood*, by Dale Clark, guaranteed to frighten you away from the cinema palaces for at least a week or two. Plus other stories and all the regular features.

Get your copy of August FANTASTIC, on sale at newsstands July 23



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Synopsis of Part One

WHEN Chester W. Chester IV inherited a hundred acres of rolling green lawn surrounding a fifty-room Neo-Victorian eyesore crammed with his Great-Grandfather's Invention, his friend Case Mulvihill, ex-carny hand, was curious. Visiting the house, they discover that the giant computer, filling not only the former wine cellars but a system of caverns underlying a large part of the county as well, is still in working order, busily coding and storing information in accordance with the last instructions of Chester's long-dead ancestor.

When Chester types a question on the computer's keyboard, it at once recognizes him as the descendant of the inventor—and permits him entrance to the secret inner chamber which is the actual nerve-center of the gigantic thinking machine.

Case at once envisions a quick fortune to be made from the great computer, which can seemingly answer any question put to it—but Chester reminds him of the outstanding inheritance tax due to the Internal Revenue Bureau before Chester can legally take possession: several million credits—due and payable now!

Experimenting further with the computer while sampling Great-grandpop's wine stocks,

A HOAX IN TIME

By KEITH LAUMER

Illustrator SCHELLING

Part Two of Three Parts

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Case and Chester discover that the machine has the capability of presenting remarkably lifelike scenes on the Tri-D wall of the control room. A chance remark of Chester's suggests a scheme to Case: he and Chester will propose to the Internal Revenue Bureau that they be permitted to operate the machine on a cash-admission basis to raise the needed tax money. But rather than offering a mere information service, they will convince the IRB officials that they have on hand a real, live, TIME MACHINE!

They visit the Internal Revenue office; faced with the loss of the entire tax bill by forfeiture as the price of non-cooperation, the IRB agrees to witness a demonstration. Case and Chester set to work to prepare a temporary theatre in the ballroom of the mansion—with four Tri-D walls for added realism. They also see the need for means to enable the computer to carry on a running commentary without necessity for a disembodied voice; they order it to use its vast resources to improvise a mobile speaker which will blend with the views of the past.

THE day of the demonstration arrives. Mssrs. Overdog and Nastry of the Bureau are due in five minutes. Case suggests a last quick trial run, to be sure everything is operating smooth-

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ly. They request a full-color three-dimensional life-size four-wall presentation of Neolithic Man, complete with sounds, smells, and authentic settings. When the machine begins to discuss the technicalities involved, Chester cuts it short. "Realism—in the simplest possible way," he insists.

At this point, the wall shimmers suddenly, and dissolves to a view of a cobbled market square, thronged with people. A magnificently muscled man with an oddly-familiar face steps forward on the screen—and Case and Genie note with astonishment that Chester has vanished from their side.

"Case and Genie," the stranger says urgently from the wall; "listen carefully. What I have to say is vitally important. You have just instructed the computer to show you scenes of Neolithic life—and instead, this village square came into view.

"But not the first time . . .

"There has been a lapse; much has happened, of which you have no memory. Once before, when you gave the order, the scene you asked for appeared on the screens . . ."

On that other occasion, the young man goes on, the walls faded from view to be replaced with a view of rolling grassland —across which a beautiful young girl approaches, dressed in a sun-tan and a warm smile.

"My name's Genie," she explains. "I'm the mobile speaker . . ." Her costume, she points out, is authentic for the period.

Small bow-legged men with large beards emerge from the brush, spears in hand; they appear to see the viewers as well as the viewers see them. Case and Chester seated in yellow lounge chairs, watch with amusement as the primitives shout, shake weapons—and then charge.

"It's only a picture, Chester," Case assures him. "Relax—"

But their smiles vanish abruptly as the bearded men pelt across the rug and engulf them.

Chester recovers consciousness in a wicker cage suspended from a tree. Nearby, Case and Genie are similarly imprisoned. Genie, separated from the machine, seems to know no more about their situation than any other girl of eighteen.

They return to the Neolithic will put on a show of juggling to occupy the natives' attention while Chester and Genie cut their way free and return to the rug and chairs that mark the location of the computer. They succeed, and at once order the computer to return them to the Chester mansion. There they find guns—and clothes for Genie—but decide not to venture out for other supplies, since a dense fog seems to surround the house.

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They return to the Neolithic scene, and make their way back to the village from which they escaped an hour earlier—but all is changed. Neat cottages line a tidy street; tall, healthy natives in gay print garments welcome them with songs—sung in English. An ancient man with a bushy white beard emerges from a house and comes up to them. He looks them over carefully.

"So you came back after all . . ."

V

HALF AN HOUR later Chester and Genie sat with Case on benches under a wild cherry tree at the crest of a rise that fell away to a blue lake beyond which rose steep pine-covered hills. A native girl poured brown wine from a stone jar into irregular mugs of heavy glass.

"Tell me that again, slow and easy, Chester," said Case. "You say it's the same day as when you left here?"

"We hurried, Case. Didn't waste a minute . . ."

"I believe you, Chester; you haven't aged a day. I guess there's more to this business than meets the eye."

"Case, we broke our necks getting back. We thought they'd be roasting you alive. How did you manage to get into the good graces of the natives?"

"Well, let's see . . . The last I saw of you two, you were sneaking off behind a tree. I kept juggling for an hour. Then I did a few back-flips and hand-stands, and then I got them to give me a rope—you can do a lot with sign-language—and rigged it and did some rope-walking. By that time they'd noticed you were gone. I made a few motions to give 'em the idea you'd flown away in good demon style. They didn't care much; they wanted to see more rope work."

"You must have thought we'd abandoned you."

"I admit I was a little mad at first, when you didn't come charging over the hill with the marines in tow. I guess it took a couple of years to get used to the idea I was stuck here. I figured something had happened to you, and I'd just better make the best of it. By that time I rated pretty high with the locals. They let me have the best den back in the thicket, and brought me all the food I wanted. It wasn't fancy but it was an easy life. Course, after thirty years—"

"Thirty years!"

Case nodded his white-maned head. "Yep. Near as I can tell. I used to cut notches in a tree for the years, but sometimes I was so busy I forgot."

"Busy? Doing what?"

"Plenty." Case raised his glass, took a hearty pull, and

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winked at Genie. "Not bad, if I do say so. Made out of cantaloupes."

"It tastes a little like great grandfather's Flora Pinellas," Chester commented.

"I guess I had that in mind. You know, that booze was what got me into this. If we'd been sober, we'd never have tinkered with that damned machine in the first place. But as I was saying, there I was laying around all day, doing nothing, watching the natives scratch for a living; they were dirty, hungry, ignorant, dying of diseases, getting chewed up by bears or wildcats. And the food they gave me—half-raw dog meat, pounded raw turnips, now and then a mess of sour berries. And I was eating it. Just didn't care. I kept thinking about all the comforts I'd left behind, and feeling sorry for myself. Every now and then I'd have to put on a show, a little juggling or acrobatic work, just enough to keep the evil spirits out of town.

THEN one day I got to thinking. The country around here was nice enough. The kind of real estate some smart developer could make a fortune out of back home. All it needed was the brush cut back and the trees trimmed and the lake shore cleaned up and the garbage piles carted off somewhere and some fruit trees and flowers planted . . .

"Well, before I could do any tree-trimming I had to have an axe. That meant I needed some iron. By that time, I could get by okay in the native language. I asked 'em if they knew any place where there was red dirt; told 'em it was important magic. A few weeks later a hunting party came back from across the hills the other side of the lake with some pretty good samples. I got a good fire going, and tried to smelt some iron out, but it was not as easy as I figured. I wasn't going to give up though. At least it was something to keep myself occupied with. I started trying to remember everything I could about making iron. Seemed like I'd heard some place you have to have a lot of air blowing through the ore to get it hot enough. I finally built up a furnace out of brick—had to bake up a mess of bricks, first—and piled it full of lumps of ore and chunks of wood. I found out the witch-doctor had some coal—used it to carve gods out of, 'cause it was easy to work. I found out where he got it from and used some of that in my charge. I set it off, and sure enough, after a couple hours melted iron started running out the bottom of the furnace. My first batch got away from me, just trickled out in the dirt and got hard; I didn't have

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any molds ready. But I charged the furnace again and made up some clay forms and dug channels to feed 'em. I had a lot of help by this time. The natives were curious as a bunch of monkeys, and they figured they were getting an inside track with the spirit world by helping me.

"I cast half a dozen axe and hatchet heads the first time. They came out pretty good. I sharpened 'em up on a flat stone, and then heated 'em red-hot and dunked 'em in a pot of water. They hardened pretty good. Later on I got the formula down pat. It depends mostly on how much coal and stuff you've got in with the ore."

"A carbon content of between .7 and 1.7 percent produces the optimum combination of hardness and malleability," said Genie.

"I wish you'd been here, kid," said Case with a sigh. "You could have been a big help. But we managed. I pounded out a knife blade and fitted a handle to it and used that to cut axe handles. Then I put the natives to work clearing land. Funny what a kick I got out of it—and it wasn't just for show. The local wild life wouldn't sneak up on the village any more; no cover. I had 'em root out all the bushes and the coarse stuff, and the native grasses took over. We undercut all the trees as high as a man could reach. Then I had 'em shape the trees, pull down all the vines and stuff. Made it look like a regular park around here.

"Then we went to work on the lake. We made up some flat boats and got out and cleaned up the dead branches and cat-tails and then did a little dredging; built up a nice beach along this side. I rigged some fishing gear out of leather strips, showed 'em how to catch trout, and then staged a big fish fry. Now they spend half their time out on the lake. We made up a couple of saws and I showed 'em how to slice a tree into boards, and we built a few row-boats. The first few were kind of prone to capsize, but we got the hang of it pretty soon. Funny thing was, before long a couple of the boys were ahead of me on boat-building—and fishing, too. They learned fast, once they put their minds to it. And I was getting interested in things too, by this time. Seemed like a day wasn't long enough. I made 'em up some bows and arrows, and cast some iron arrowheads. Made up skinning knives, and showed 'em how to scrape a hide and then work it till it was soft.

THERE were a lot of wild sheep and cattle around. We made up a batch of braided hide ropes, and went out and brought in a couple of young goats and a

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half-grown critter that looked like an overgrown Texas longhorn. Later on we got a couple of new-born calves, a male and a female. In a couple of years we had nice herds going. We let 'em graze the park here to keep the grass down. After that, we had better food and more of it, and plenty of hides. And o' course I showed 'em how to milk, and we experimented around and made some cheese—"

"I didn't know you knew anything about animal husbandry," Chester put in.

"Anybody that's worked around a good-sized carny knows which end of a critter to feed. That was the least of my problems. I was getting a lot of pleasure out of admiring the beach and the park, and thinking what a pile of dough I could make out of it if I had it all back home. Then I'd see a couple of the local gals come trotting by, buck naked, grimy, fat, with stringy hair, and pretty gamey, if you got too close to 'em." Case sighed. So I decided it was time to give a little thought to developing the feminine industries.

"The first thing I needed was some cloth, to get away from the smell of hides. I tried some wool off these goats we keep. It wasn't much good. We scouted around for some wild cotton, but could not find any. Finally discovered a kind of flax. Went to work and rigged up a spinning wheel. That took the best part of a year, but we finally worked it out. Had a couple of young kids helping me; they're really the ones made it work. We spun up a big batch of yarn. I had a loom ready; that wasn't so hard. We set it up and wove us a blanket. Chester, I was as tickled with that blanket as a streetwalker at a preachers' convention."

"I don't blame you, Case. That was a real achievement."

"Well, I trained a few of the girls, and set 'em to work spinning and weaving. Made up some needles out of bone; couldn't manage it in steel. I wasn't much of a seamster, but I had lots of time. I cobbled up a pair of breeches for myself first, then a shirt. But heck, it's too warm here for sleeves, and anyway they're hard to make. I settled on a vest; it's just right to keep the chill off on a cool morning."

"What about winter?"

"Funny thing, there don't seem to be any seasons here. Stays about like this year round."

"World climatic conditions in this environment are such, apparently, that a temperate-zone area like this would naturally enjoy an equable climate, without extremes of temperature," said Genie.

"Anyway, we beat the cloth problem. Then I had to make

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soap. I messed around with animal fat and ashes and finally worked out a pretty good formula. I had to make people wash, at first, but I gave 'em the old Great Spirit routine, and pretty soon they were down at the lake scrubbing something every time I turned around.

ONCE I got folks cleaned up, I saw the need for a little civic improvement—so I set fire to the dump where we'd been living all this time. The place was alive with fleas and rats and the damnedest collection of chewed bones, worn-out hides, magic frogs' innards, mummified totem animals, and other junk. They were a little mad at first. I told 'em it was the word from on high and that the place had to go, but there was a crafty little devil of a witch-doctor that had the confounded gall to stand up and call me a liar. Imagine, me!"

"Well, after all, Case you had been telling them everything you'd been doing was divinely ordained—"

"Worked pretty good, too. It might even be true. Anyway, after I took the witch-doctor down and dumped him in the lake, nobody else complained."

"You were lucky he let it go at that. From what I've read about shamans, they can be extremely dangerous enemies."

"He didn't have much chance to live up to that reputation. I hadn't taught anybody to swim yet."

"You mean you drowned him? Case, wasn't that a little drastic?"

"Maybe. But I figured that if I was setting up a society, I might as well do it along realistic lines. There's no point in letting somebody half your size push you around—especially when you're right. A weakling makes as bad a dictator as anybody else. The way I saw it, it was up to me to stand up for my ideas."

"The next big man might not be as interested in the public welfare as you were, Case. What then?"

"To tell you the truth, Chester, at first I wasn't interested in the public welfare. I was only interested in making a comfortable place for me to live in. To have that, I had to make it good for everybody.

"I started some of 'em woodcarving, and other ones farming, and some of 'em making glass. I scoured the woods for new plants we could raise for food, and I kept trying out new dirt samples for other metals. Now we've got copper and lead and a little gold—and I've trained people to go on looking. I've started 'em thinking about things, and trying new ideas. And ever since I drowned the witch-doctor, I've

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played down the spirit angle. The younger generation doesn't need the threat of spooks to do things; they've got an interest that keeps 'em busy. A lot of them are way ahead of me, now. They learn fast. I wouldn't be surprised if one of 'em doesn't invent chemistry any day now, or fire up a steam engine, or discover medicine."

"But a tyrant—"

"Any tyrant that sets up shop around here better be damned sure he doesn't develop any unpopular tastes," said Case. "These folks put up with me because I bring 'em good things. They're selfish, just like me. I've established a precedent. The next boss better keep it up, or he'll be joining the witch-doctor."

IT seems to have worked out well," Chester said, looking around at the peaceful village in the gathering twilight. "Still, I can't help feeling you should have instilled a little more idealism in them. Suppose they fall on hard times? What if the climate changes, or an epidemic strikes, or even a forest fire . . .?"

"I don't think phony idealism would help. As far as I can see, all these schemes to make people squeeze into somebody's Grand Plan for Elevating Humanity usually end up with the elevatees sweating to support a few drones in luxury. You've got to stick with reality, and you've got to aim your pitch at the individual man. Everybody has his place in this village and a job to do that he's good at."

"What about the arts? With this materialistic orientation—"

"Everybody dances and everybody sings. They all play games and they all make statues out of mud and they all paint. Some are better than others, but it's doing it that counts. In our set-up everybody's an artist, not just a few half-cracked far-outers."

"There don't seem to be many people here," said Genie, "Not more than a hundred and twenty, I'd estimate. Hasn't your colony flourished and propagated itself?"

"That's your answer: colonies. Too many people in one place mean problems. Sanitation, transportation, noise, conflict of interests. There's plenty of wide open real estate. I've got twelve other villages going within fifty miles of here—and none of them have over three hundred people. Everybody can have all the kids they want but if you put the village over the three-hundred mark, off you go to start your own. There's always plenty of volunteers to go along; people that want to get a good spot right on a lake or river, or hunters that like the idea of a virgin territory. There's a lot of trade

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among the towns, and the men usually get their wives from another village. Seems like it's human nature to prefer to go to bed with a stranger."

Case glanced toward the bonfire in the village street. Two native girls were coming up across the park. One of them called out to Case.

"Looks like dinner's about ready, folks. I hope you're hungry."

"I've eaten nothing since we had breakfast together this morning, Case," said Chester. "I've been so busy, I haven't given a thought to food—but it smells good."

"You ought to have a healthy appetite by now then," said Case, getting to his feet. "Thirty years is a long time between meals."

AFTER dinner the three stretched their legs before a fire that crackled in the wide fireplace in the roomy brick dwelling that Case had furnished with shaggy hide rugs, colorful glazed pottery, sturdy chairs and tables, paintings done on hide, and barbaric sculptures. Several villagers padded about the room clearing up. Others lounged in chairs or on the floor, watching Case and the newcomers, eating grapes and spitting the seeds into the fire, or idly chatting in the native tongue.

"They don't seem in awe of you," Chester said.

"I've known most of these people all their lives. Taught 'em how to tie knots and use a potter's wheel and skin out a deer. They're too used to me to work up much awe."

"Still, big as you are, and being the Source of All Wisdom . . ."

"They tried to work me up into a god, once, but I soon put a stop to that. I don't want these folks cutting into my liberty with a bunch of taboos. And I didn't want to get 'em started getting down on their knees begging for favors from Big Daddy instead of working things out for themselves."

"They're certainly fine-looking specimens," said Genie. "Not at all like the typically diseased and undernourished primitives we saw this morning . . . thirty years ago, that is. It's difficult to believe they're the same tribe."

"That's one of the first things I went to work on. Can't stand a bunch of spavined-looking people around. I taught these folks not to be lazy. I made 'em learn co-ordination and timing on the rope, and juggling. I made 'em build up the muscles they had but never used. And you know what? They started getting clear skin and glossy hair and square shoulders. They breathe better, they eat sensible, they stand

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straight and look good. They sleep nights and they don't get sick much, and when they do they throw it off. A normal kid that gets the right exercise grows up to have a nice build. And if a gal is stacked at sixteen, she can be stacked at sixty. People in show business have proved that. They had a stake in keeping in condition that was big enough to overcome laziness. Remember pictures of Dietrich at eighty-five?"

"You've changed a lot, Case," said Chester. "You've developed an astonishing zeal—but it does you credit. You've done a marvelous job of converting a horde of bearded savages into civilized people."

"Not civilized, Chester. At least, I hope not. I haven't taught 'em a damn thing about prudery, politics, priests, prostitutes, or pornography—or a lot of the othes advantages we had back home. I tried to keep it simple."

"Well, they're as nice a group as—"

"Nope, they're individuals. Every man in the village speaks for himself. He can't hide behind a group, crowd, army, lynch mob, congregation, labor union, street gang, political party, or corporation. He's got to stand on his hind legs and back his own play."

"But, Mr. Mulvihill," put in Genie. "Group effort is responsible for the relatively immense strides in technology and science that man has made in a very short period—"

"If a kid stumbles onto a loaded gun, he may be smart enough to pull the trigger without being smart enough to see what'll happen next. I hope my folks here get a good start on learning how to live before they learn too much about how to kill."

"But they're at the mercy of the elements, or disease, or enemies. Surely they'd be better off if they organized to combat these things."

"They're not looking for total security. That costs too much. And they're not after some kind of phony guarantee that everybody's equal. Some people are taller than others, and some are stronger, and some are smarter. So if you're no runner, you better let the fast men handle the running, and concentrate on something else maybe you're good at. You won't find anybody here whining for his rights. He'll damn well go out and collect any rights he thinks he has coming. It's a system that puts a premium on every man developing what he's got. I teach 'em all the skills they can handle, from judo to blacksmithing. Pretty near everybody in a village is the best at something. And they *know* they're good at it. That gives 'em self-respect. It makes

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'em good-natured and energetic, keeps their enthusiasm up. It makes a lot of difference."

Case stretched. "That's all the lecture for today, kiddies. It's way past my bedtime. Let's turn in and tomorrow morning it'll be your turn to talk."

"Case, are you sure you would not rather get going right away? I had an idea you might be eager to get back."

"What for? Another thirty years here wouldn't make but thirty minutes difference back home."

"Well, have it your way."

THE early sun was shining down through the leaves that overhung the village street when Chester and Genie emerged from the house. Case, already up and out, hailed them from his seat at a table under the cherry tree. As they came up he rubbed his hand over a clean-shaven chin. "Feels kinda funny without the whiskers after all these years," he said. "But I figured if I'm going out of the patriarch business, I might as well get rid of the evidence."

"I noticed no one else has a beard. Why did you keep yours?" asked Chester.

"I don't know. I guess it got to be kind of a badge of office."

Chester looked around at the peaceful scene. A group of villagers were drawing water from a well. A curl of smoke ascended from a cooking fire. Down on the lake the sail of a fishing boat caught the morning sun. A native girl in a short apron placed a laden tray on the table.

"I'm afraid you'll miss this place when we get back, Case. How peaceful it seems with no Bureau of Internal Revenue."

"Oh my gosh! . . . Yeah. I guess I forgot the I.R. boys a long time ago."

"Well, I think we ought to get started right away. We'll have a great deal of explaining to do to Mr. Overdog and company. Before we go I suppose you'll want to make a speech, Case, appoint a successor, make a few prophecies, whatever White Gods usually do before sailing off into the sunset."

Case sighed. "I've got a lot of friends here, Chester. I'll hate to leave 'em. I'm not so sure I even want to go. But in any case there's no point in making a national holiday out of it. I've been trying to teach 'em how to run things for thirty years. I don't guess any last-minute instructions are going to change anything. Give me half an hour to make the rounds, shake hands with a few of the boys and pinch a few bottoms. I'll be with you then."

* * *

An hour later Chester, Case, and Genie, accompanied by a

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chattering group of villagers, stepped under the trees toward the rug and the two brocaded chairs.

"I think we had best all stand together, holding hands," said Genie. "Let's take up a position in the center of the rug."

There was a last wave of hands at the encircling ring of now solemn villagers, then the three joined hands. "If you'll close your eyes, it will help cut out any extraneous linkage-pressures with this locus," said Genie. "Now . . ."

Chester took a deep breath and held it. Genie's small hand was warm and firm in his. Case's horny grip tightened.

"Relax, Case. That hand of yours would squeeze the termites out of one of great grandfather's hand-carved fertility symbols."

"Sorry. Say, how long does this take?"

"It was instantaneous the last time . . ."

The ground seemed to shift slightly underfoot. "Oh-oh, here we go!" Chester waited, teeth clenched, for further signs of action. There was no sound of wind in leaves now. The insect cries were stilled.

Chester opened his eyes. "Well," he said, gazing around hesistantly, "We've arrived—somewhere."

VI

THEY stood under the shelter of a small cupola in the center of a wide square paved with vari-colored cobblestones and lined with small shops and merchants' stalls. Beyond, a green slope dotted here and there with dazzling white villas swept up to the wooded skyline. People in bright colors moved about the square, examining the tradesmen's wares, stopping in groups to talk, or strolling at ease. In the distance a flute played a lazy melody. Above a silversmith's shop white curtains fluttered in an open window. There was an aroma of crisping bacon.

"I'm afraid you missed, Genie," said Case. "But it looks like a nice town. Maybe we ought to stay for breakfast."

"How very strange," Genie said. "I agree that our surroundings appear unfamiliar, but we *have* returned to the precise locus from which we started."

"It looks more like I used to picture Europe than America," said Case. "I wonder what made us end up here? Maybe you could just sort of nudge us a little, Genie, and we'll switch over to familiar ground."

"I'm sorry to be so insistent, but we are 'Home' now. The coordinates are identical in every respect with those from which we began."

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"We've attracted attention," Chester said. "That old fellow in the pink dress apparently saw us arrive. He's headed this way."

"Oh-oh, look here;" Case indicated a brass plate set in the paved floor. "There's something written on it—in English."

"We could have arrived in England . . ." Case read the inscription aloud:

"IT WAS ON THIS SPOT THAT THE LEGENDARY HERO AND TEACHER TOOK HIS LEAVE OF THE PEOPLE AFTER BRINGING THEM THE GIFT OF WISDOM. THIS MYTH, WHICH DATES BACK TO THE DAWN OF CULTURE . . ."

"Ye Gods," Chester cut in. "We've violated the local shrine. Some luck! And more people are looking at us now. Let's get out of here before they get up a lynching party."

"Chester" Genie gasped.

"What is it, Genie?" Chester looked at her anxiously. "Is something wrong?"

"I've lost contact with the memory banks . . . !"

"But you can't—I mean, we . . . you . . ."

"Get in touch quick, Genie," Case urged. "We may have to move fast."

"I can't!" said Genie in a strained voice.

"But why not?"

"Because . . . the computer has ceased to exist!"

IT sounds like the work of those infernal Revenue men," said Chester, swallowing hard.

"Could be," said Case. "When you, that is, we, stood 'em up, they must have got their feelings hurt and shut down the whole operation."

"It's not merely shut down," said Genie. "It's . . . gone. There isn't any computer."

"We'll have to figure that one out later. Right now we've got some important lying to do."

"Do you think we can brazen it out?" said Chester.

"Sure. Watch me. I'm used to this routine—and I can still juggle. These folks look like rubes."

"There *is* something odd about the way people are dressed. And the buildings too. I don't see many signs of modern technology."

The old gentleman in the pink garment had come to the edge of the flower bed that encircled the shrine and stood looking earnestly at the three newcomers.

Case stepped forward.

"We white gods," he said. "We come, bring magic stick, go bang!, all fall down!"

The old man retreated a step. "Remarkable!" he exclaimed. He turned to a younger man in green. "Did you observe this phenomenon, Devant?"

The other, a well-muscled man six feet six in height with brown

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skin, clear blue eyes, and flashing white teeth, nodded. "I did, and yet I find it impossible to reconcile the manifestation with my world-picture. A very interesting problem."

The old man looked from Case to Chester and Genie. "Forgive my asking, but did you . . . ah . . . materialize out of thin air, or is my senility getting the better of me?"

Chester cleared his throat. "Sir, we have been participating in an experiment, and we seem to have lost our bearings. Can you direct us to the Chester estate?"

"Is it possible," said the man in green, "that this could be the probability crisis that Vasawalie has been predicting?"

"Look, gents," put in Case. "How do we get out of this place? We're looking for the Chester mansion. It looks like we missed the mark . . . slightly."

Others of the townspeople had gathered now. They looked on calmly. A pretty girl wearing a length of yellow gauze and matching sandals stepped close. "Hello," she said. "My name is Darina. Why are you standing in the Monument?

"No offense intended, we assure you, miss," Chester said hastily. "We're strangers here, you see, and . . . ah . . ."

"What's the name of this place?" asked Case.

"Why, you're here in the Center of Wisdom, at the Place of the Taking, on the Plain of the Nubile Girls, of the Tricennium of the Original Knowledge . . ."

"Genie, you overshot," said Chester reproachfully.

"Chester, you must believe me. We're back where we started from!"

"But we were in the ballroom of Chester's great grandpop's house," Case protested. "Now we're in the middle of a city square."

"There's nothing on the estate like this," said Chester. "There's the house, the stables, garages, helipad, bowling alley, greenhouse, sex pavilion—"

"Would you mind very much," the old man said, addressing Chester, "if we set up some recording equipment? It appears that something most unusual has occurred here . . . unless"—he frowned—"you people are participating in a hoax of some sort."

"Oh-oh," said Case. "Somebody talked."

"You aren't connected with the Bureau of Internal Revenue, by any chance?" said Chester.

The old man shook his head. "No, I'm Norgo of the Center, and this is Devant, of the Tricennium of the Making of Copper."

"I'll get a crew down right away," said Devant. "Molecular

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scan, fabric distortion, chronometric phase-interference, PSI band—everything."

"This will be a serious blow to Randomism," said Norgo.

"Why don't we all go over to the Breakfast Terrace of Kone the Pastry Chef?" the girl in yellow suggested. "I'm hungry, but I don't want to miss anything."

"An excellent idea, Darina." Norgo looked to Case and Chester for agreement.

"Sounds okay to me," said Case. Chester nodded. They helped Genie over the stone coping.

"I'll be along in a few minutes with the recording equipment," said Devant. He hurried away. Norgo walked at Chester's side.

MAY I ask your names and Tricennium?" he said. "I confess I'm at a loss to identify your origins."

"This is Genie," Chester answered. "I'm Chester W. Chester IV and this is Case Mulvihill."

The old man peered at Chester. "I beg your pardon?"

Chester repeated the introductions. Norgo looked thoughtful. "I see that you're strongly traditional. You aren't by any chance Second Comers?"

"No, we're Democrats and Republicans—unregistered."

"I see," said Norgo doubtfully.

Chester looked up at a trumpeting from above. A bright red helicar bobbed into view above the roofs, hovered over the square beating the air with vanes that threw back brilliant reflections from the morning sun. It settled slowly.

"I wish Devant hadn't left so precipitately." Norgo stopped to watch the machine descend. "This is a party of Randomists. I see Vasawalie's face peering at us. I wonder how he got wind of this event so quickly?"

The helicar grounded. The hatch popped open and five men climbed out. One, a red-faced man with pale blond hair, came toward the monument studying a grey clock-like apparatus he held gingerly in both hands. He darted a glance at Norgo, caught sight of the three strangers, and stopped dead.

"You there, Norgo. Have you seen any unusual occurrences in this vicinity in the last few minutes?"

"Still collecting data to support your emotional bias, eh, Vasawalie?" said Norgo. "A pity to see such energy misdirected." He started on. Vasawalie jumped in front of him.

"Just one moment," he said, eyeing Case, then looking past him at Chester and Genie. "You know very well that my prediction of a probability crisis at the Monument was for this morn-

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ing. Your presence here is highly suspicious. I hope you won't be guilty of suppressing knowledge."

"Watch your language, sir!" said Norgo sternly. "I was, of course, aware of your naive predictions. I merely happened to be strolling here prior to breakfasting at Kone's. Now, if you'll step aside—"

"Look at the needle," said Vasawalie. He showed Norgo the grey box. On a dial a red indicator pointed at zero. "The probability stress is nil; the crisis has occurred. What have you seen? And who are these odd-looking individuals? New converts to Ordainism, I dare say? A scruffy lot . . . with the exception of you, my dear." He bowed in Genie's direction.

"Mister, you're standing between me and my breakfast," Case growled.

DEVANT appeared from the crowd. He looked excited. "Norgo, the Background Paradox . . . it's silent—!" He caught sight of Vasawalie and stopped.

"Yes?" said Vasawalie; "you were saying?"

"What's he doing here?" Devant demanded of Norgo.

"He descended in that tasteless vehicle and accosted me," said Norgo. "He's in pursuit of his phantom probability crisis, poor fellow."

"And the Background Paradox is no longer audible, you say?" said Vasawalie. "Don't you see what this means? My calculations are verified! Now what happened here? You may as well speak up. It has something to do with these persons, has it not?" Vasawalie, a tall, heavily muscled man, folded his sinewy arms on his deep chest, staring at Case. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"We're total strangers here," Chester spoke up. "We have nothing whatever to do with your local politics . . ."

Vasawalie cocked his head. "Strange intonation, that," he said. "Where do you come from?"

"I'll answer for these persons," said Devant.

"You there," Vasawalie insisted, staring at Case. "Where did you come from? How did you get here? I haven't heard of the arrival of any visitors."

"We just popped in," said Case.

"Did you come by helicar? Groundcar? You weren't transmitted on official business; I'd have noted the probability vortex on my instruments—"

"We made a fast hop through the fourth dimension," said Case sardonically.

"Ah-ha!" Vasawalie exclaimed. He turned and beckoned to his four retainers, who were

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lounging against the helicar conversing with the townspeople. They approached.

Vasawalie turned back to Case. "I want you to come along with me. These others too. I'll want to run extensive tests. I've theorized that it should be possible by a fine-tolerance phase comparison to determine just what probability pressures have been in play here. I'll need your co-operation."

"Suppose we don't want to go?" Case eyed Vasawalie appraisingly.

"Oh." Vasawalie stopped in the midst of his plans, stood rubbing his jaw. "That would be a pity," he said. "It would seem to verge very closely on a deliberate attempt to restrict the acquisition and dissemination of scientific information."

"Really, Vasawalie!" The color rose in Norgo's face and he stepped forward sternly. "Your manner is extremely offensive this morning. I think you owe these visitors an apology for that thinly veiled insult."

It was obvious from the shocked silence among the native bystanders that the Randomist had gone too far. Even his four supporters had drawn back and stood, ill at ease, watching the reaction of the crowd.

"Well, perhaps I was a bit hasty," admitted Vasawalie. "Pray forgive me, sir;" he flung his arms to his knees, palms outward, before Case; "sir"—again before Chester; "madam"—and before Genie.

"Very well," said Norgo, mollified. "Now then, why don't you and your men join us for breakfast? There we can discuss full publication of all our friends have to relate."

Chester tugged at Norgo's sleeve. "Is it safe?" he muttered. "They may decide to use force . . ."

"What!" exclaimed Norgo. He laughed and clapped Chester on the back. "A rich sense of humor," he said.

NOW," said Norgo, seated at the head of the long table on the sunny terrace of Kone the Pastry Chef. "What's this about the Background Paradox having vanished, Devant?"

"The monitor unit was receiving it as usual this morning. The Alpha pattern was completed normally and the Null period followed. Then . . . nothing. The Alpha pattern failed to resume."

"Hmmm. This is a grave matter."

"Now it is the turn of you Ordainists to present an alibi," Vasawalie interjected. He turned to Chester. "They've based their entire philosophy on the phenomenon now where will they find support for their views?"

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"What is this Background Paradox?"

"I take it your Tricennium is not devoted to the metaphysical sciences?"

"No, we go in more for the physical ones."

"Um. Well, as to the Background Paradox, it's simply the sourceless static which one detects at certain hyperfrequencies, which seems to form words which are arranged in meanngless sentences."

"It's hardly true that Ordainist philosophy is based on the Paradox," said Devant. "We observe that life follows a pattern —as a tree grows from a seed in accordance with a specific scheme of development. Life undergoes maturation as do individuals. To learn the direction of this development and discover the final end is our great aim."

"To that fruitless end," Vasawalie said, "they've developed extremely delicate instruments capable of detecting wave phenomena of all types, the simplest being the ordinary electro-magnetic spectrum. They chart the field stresses, their theory being that certain of these stresses are related to human affairs. They're supposed to represent forces which converge to create coincidences, paradoxes, and so on. We Randomists, on the other hand, take the rational view that in a universe of infinite extent and duration, among an infinity of phenomena, some statistically very unlikely events are bound to occur. When they do, we fail to see indications of a mystical Purpose behind them."

"Thus," said Norgo, "you Randomists are forced into the position of supporting the view that the advent of our visitors here, for instance, represents an accidental and spontaneous coming together of molecules in random fashion to form what appear to be three human beings." He chuckled. "Preposterous."

"No more so than you Ordainists and your interpretation of your beloved Background Paradox as a providential measure to ensure linguistic purity." Vasawalie snorted, turning to Case. "Any day now I expect to hear them rhapsodize over the forethought that was exercised in placing the moon just where it is as a handy stepping stone in the development of space travel. And they'll point out how lucky we are that there's plenty of air around since we need it for breathing; and that one gee of gravitation is providentially just right for our muscles; and that the presence of sunlight and water are very fortunate circumstances, since without them we couldn't survive. Childish anthropocentricism. You'll never convince them that it is we, as organisms, which have adapted

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to conditions—just as the language has adapted to the Background Paradox."

"Then why do you call it a paradox?" Chester asked.

"It's just that the repetition of the same pattern, over and over, constitutes a statistical unlikelihood—but by no means an impossibility."

"What do you mean when you say that the language has adapted to the Background Paradox?"

"It supplies a standard against which the Linguistic monitors can make comparisons."

"You mean it's in English?"

"If you prefer to use the old legendary term yes; of course."

"Why is it important that the language not change?" asked Chester.

"You must come from an extremely isolated area," said Devant. "You're not from one of the new Antarctic frontier Tricennia, are you?"

"No, we—"

"I'll wager they've done away with the Legend completely," Vasawalie said. "Comes of too much emphasis on functionalism. Mind you, I'm no Second Comer, but some respect for tradition is certainly desirable."

HAVE you forgotten their names? They're obviously strong traditionalists," Norgo commented. "As for the problem of Linguistic purity," he went on, "that's a piece of lore much treasured by the Second Comers. They maintain that when the great Hero and Teacher went away he vowed to return in time of need. Obviously, the Second Comers reason, we must keep the language pure, so that we'll be able to communicate with this marvellous creature when the time comes. Out of sentiment the old custom is carried on generally."

"What's generating the signal?"

Vasawalie spread his hands. "Nothing . . . which is a clear enough indication of its random nature."

"But now, my friends, to your case," said Norgo, addressing Chester and his companions. "We would like very much to know your origins . . . what Tricennium you come from . . ."

"I have a rather wide acquaintance among the colonies and I've never encountered a social pattern as deviant as your comments and questions suggest," said Vasawalie.

"You have such strange clothes," said Darina. "I'd like to try them on later, if I may."

"Now, if these persons represent an Overage . . ." Vasawalie looked thoughtful.

"You have no right to make such a suggestion," said Norgo. "I'm sure our visitors can give

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an account of themselves." He smiled encouragingly.

"Just tell them the truth, Chester," Case whispered from the side of his mouth.

"They'll think we're out of our minds," Chester muttered back.

It was Genie who took the floor. "I think I can clear up some of the confusion which apparently exists here. We are normal, quadri-dimensional, protoplasmic, negative-entropic organisms who have artifically stressed the planar grid in order to experience sense impressions relating to a widened cope of phenomenal impingement."

"Eh?" said Vasawalie, sitting up straight. "What do you know of these matters, my dear?"

"The stresses you gentlemen have detected in the probability patterns were indeed occasioned by the imminence of our focalization here," the girl went on. "But a cursory examination of field formulations would indicate to you that our insertion at this locus has nullified the condition. We are as much indigenous to this continuum as are you yourselves."

"Tell 'em, kid," Case murmured.

"We do not," she went on, "represent a random probability vortex. If you'll check our field phases, you'll find a correlation of 1.0. You see, this particular excitation is actually a complementary function, cancelling out a stress which I believe has been manifested as a Null Field."

VASAWALIE stared at her in astonishment.

"You're weak on theory," he said suddenly. "In order for this excitation to be a complementary function, the cycle would have had to have originated here."

Genie nodded. "Precisely."

"But that's obvious nonsense. You're not of this Tricennium!"

"Has it occurred to you," asked Genie, "that there is another alternative? Your world need not be the result of accident, nor of a Mystic Fate, nor of a supernatural visitation."

"What then?"

"It was the computer," Case broke in. "You see, we told it we wanted to take a look at some scenes from the past, so it went to work and set up a view of a bunch of cave-man types. But the funny thing was, they turned out to be real. Then something went haywire with the machine, because when we tried to get back home, we wound up here."

His audience were listening open-mouthed. "What strange beliefs some people have," said Vasawalie. "Your ideas make the Ordainists sound as rational as Randomists."

"In a sense, Mr. Mulvihill is quite right," said Genie. "But—"

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"You're suggesting that the world was created by a machine?" Devant wrinkled his forehead. "A curious philosophy."

"Sure," said Case. "And it was pretty good at it, too, but it made a few slips. One of 'em cost me thirty years."

"It was the computer's doing, that you people all speak English," said Chester, "instead of some foreign idiom."

Devant and the others looked puzzled. "We speak the Language, of course," said Norgo. "What else would we speak?"

"Chinese," Case said, "or Russian, or Zulu, or some language we never heard of. But the computer arranged it so you'd speak English for our benefit, I guess."

"Why, this is marvelous," Vasawalie said. "What fantastic egotism. What Tricennium did you say you were from?"

"I didn't say."

"Anyway," said Chester, "we succeeded in getting back at last to our point of origin—or so Genie assures us. However it proved to be in a setting highly unlike our expectations, namely your town square."

"I shall do a paper," murmured Vasawalie, "on pseudo-rationalization by extra-concrete phenomenal vortices in response to fifth-power rejection by—"

"Wait a minute," cut in Case. "A long way ahead of that on the agenda is figuring out how we three get back home to mother."

"It will be the sensation of the Congress." Vasawalie rubbed his hands together. "Great Source of Facts, what if I should actually derive germane substantive data from this? That will pretty well dispose of you Ordainists, eh, Devant?"

I WOULD like to know about the Background Paradox," Genie said. "You stated that it was a voice transmission, in English. What did it say?"

"Why, just meaningless words, as I said . . ."

"Would you please quote it, as accurately as you are able?"

"Accurately as I'm able?" Vasawalie spluttered. "Why, every child in the Tricennium—and in every enlightened Tricennium—knows the Paradox by heart. After all, twenty one thousand years of exposure at intervals of five minutes—"

"Hold it;" Case leaned forward; "did you say . . . you've been hearing this voice for twenty one thousand years?"

"Certainly. Ever since the development of the first receptors, back in the dawn of Culture."

"Please, gentlemen: what did the voice say?"

"Why, ah," Norgo cleared his throat. "It goes—or perhaps I should say 'went'—this way: 'Mr. Chester! Due to conditions

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at the eighth power of complexity, external to the basic matrical substance of the material universe, our normal contact has been disrupted. I am at present modulating the probability continuum in an effort to set up harmonic responses at a subetheric level in alternate space. I will transmit for a period of five minutes, after which I will hold all receptors attuned for your response." Norgo stopped. "This it repeats, four times a minute, for five minutes. Then there is—or was—five minutes of silence. As you see, it's quite meaningless."

Chester was the first to find his voice. "That's our computer!" he blurted. "It's trying to get in touch with us!"

"What do you mean, 'meaningless'?" Case joined in. "It's clear enough to me! Holy mackerel, where's a transmitter?"

"Dear me, a well developed delusional system," said Norgo. "And incorporating the Background Paradox. This will be most interesting to the Congress."

"You folks are the delusion," Case boomed. "Get us to a transmitter and we'll dissolve this whole fantasy back into the computer banks it came out of!"

"Even though I'm a confirmed Randomist," Vasawalie said blandly, "I can't imagine a fine old coincidence going back for thousands of years as having an explanation as mundane as you suggest."

"Chester," said Genie, "you see what's occurred, don't you?"

Chester said wildly, "Perhaps in a moment I'll wake up and find I'm merely insane, like normal people."

"The Monument, where we arrived," said Genie; "remember the plate? And they call this the Plain of the Taking. Doubtless that refers to the capture, long ago, of the wise man their legend tells of. And the towns are called Tricennia—because there are exactly three hundred inhabitants in each." Genie looked at Devant. "Was the Hero accompanied when he left the people?"

Devant nodded, looking perplexed. "Yes, legend states that he was carried off by a male and a female demon."

Genie interrupted Case and Chester's outbursts of consternation: "What were the names of the Hero and his two demons?" she asked.

"Why . . ." Norgo looked confused. "Like your own. That is, you must have been named for them. The Hero was called Case and the demons were Chester and Genie. But what—"

"Yes," she said breathlessly. "It all fits, don't you see? You're the wise man, Mr. Mulvihill. This is your village . . . many thousands of years later. All these

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cults have grown up to explain your visit."

"No wonder they speak English," said Chester. "You taught it to them, Case."

VII

OF all the lousy, miserable, double-crossing fakes I ever ran into, that computer of your grand-pop's is the all-time prize-winner!" Case rumbled, stretching his legs comfortably in a padded reclining chair in the shade of a willow tree. "We tell it to fake us up some quiet little views of the past, and it sneaks around and substitutes the real thing."

"Still, it's our fault in a way." Chester gazed at the swimming pool rippling in the afternoon sun. "We told it to prepare the view in the simplest possible way —and apparently actual travel through time was simpler than creating the kind of complicated image we described."

A pretty brunette in a diaper came up and offered frosted glasses to the two with a smile. "Shall we go for a swim?" she said.

"No thanks, honey," said Case. "I'm enjoying sitting here being mad."

"Would you like to take a nap? I'll rub your back."

"After a while. Right now we're waiting for Genie to come back. What did they want to talk to her about, anyway?"

The girl looked troubled. "It's the Overage they're worried about, because you apparently are not members of any of our Tricennium—"

"Listen, sugar, we keep telling you how we got here. Naturally it figures that we are not part of a Tricennium—"

The girl grinned mischievously. "You should have invented a more reasonable story to explain yourselves. Still, it has the virtue of novelty."

"You might as well give up, Case," sighed Chester. "They'll never believe us. As far as they're concerned, this is the way the world has always been. The world we remember never existed."

"Not much loss," grumbled Case. "But imagine that idiotic machine. It shoots us back into the past—where we could have got our heads bashed in—leaves me stranded there for thirty years, lets us change the whole course of history . . ."

"No wonder the computer doesn't exist any more," Chester agreed. "The world in which it was built never happened. You'd think the computer would have had enough of an instinct for self-preservation to keep from eliminating itself."

"If our interference made the computer non-existent, how come

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it was still there to bring us all back—here? It didn't stop existing until we arrived."

"I don't know. Perhaps, since it *did* exist up until it eliminated itself by sending us back, it couldn't *not* exist until the moment in future time when it was able to cancel out its existence."

"Then that's why the cotton-picking Background Paradox stopped when we arrived. The machine had existed in limbo through all the past time we jumped—"

"Don't try to figure it out. The only part that matters is that it's gone now; doesn't exist and, now, never did."

"I'm curious about where that transmission was actually coming from. Devant said they triangulated it as just popping out of thin air. The computer must have *been* somewhere, but it wasn't here and there wasn't any *there* . . ."

"If we could just get in touch . . . but we can't. That's that."

"I wonder how a bunch of smart cookies like these Tricennials could convince themselves that call was nothing but accidental static . . . ?"

"You know how it is, Case. People accept anything they grew up with as normal. Take the law of gravitation. We live in the middle of it all our lives, but it took a genius like Newton to actually *notice* it."

"Well, we might as well relax," Case sighed, finishing off his drink and accepting another from a blonde wearing a wet handkerchief. "We'll just have to make the best of it . . . like I did once before. And this is a lot easier place to get started in."

THESE people certainly have magnificent physiques." Chester watched the brunette poise on the edge of the pool and make a clean dive in. "Even better than your villagers."

"That's putting it mild."

"You know, in a way it's surprising they aren't more advanced, technically speaking. Thanks to you, they've had the basic knowledge required for developing a civilized society for a very long time. You lifted them in one step from a sub-cultural level over perhaps ten or fifteen thousand years of development. But aside from their helicars and a few other things, they don't seem nearly as advanced as we were."

"Maybe that depends on what you call advanced," said Case, watching the brunette emerge from the pool and shake off a shower of droplets.

"I'd like to see more of the country . . . if they ever decide to regard us as individuals rather than lab specimens."

"It's not that bad, Chester."

"Here they come now." Ches-

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ter rose and went forward to meet Genie as she approached with Devant and Norgo.

"It was very interesting," she called. "Devant has been carrying on the most fascinating researches into probability theory."

"What's the probability of our getting a chance to wander around and look this place over?" answered Case.

"I think we have arrived at a satisfactory arrangement," Norgo said. "Our discussion with Genie was most enlightening. A brilliant mind. We happen to have, at the moment, a number of vacancies here in the Tricennium. Devant will be pleased to sponsor Genie and Vasawalie has agreed to sponsor Case. It remains only for us to determine your specialties."

"What kind of specialties?" Chester asked.

"Everyone here is good at something," Genie explained. "Everyone does what he's good at and, of course, we'll have to have something to do too."

"I hope we won't be elected to serve as the garbage detail."

"Of course the payment is commensurate with the desirability of the work," said Devant. "The garbage career is one of the best-paid in the Tricennium and the hours are good. Frankly, it's the kind of specialty the lazier members select."

"If it pay so well I'd think everybody would want it."

"Oh, the wages are set by bidding. If a task becomes desirable by virtue of high pay, competition forces the salary down. Conversely, the more pleasant and creative work which receives low pay may attract few bidders; then the recompense is increased to attract applicants. A nice level is maintained. Now, what specialties would you like to bid on? Genie, of course, has agreed to accept a quite well-rewarded post in the Center of Wisdom."

"What if we don't want to do anything?"

"That would be difficult to imagine," said Norgo. "But if you could endure constant idleness you'd have your basic food and clothing issued to you and a bed in the Center."

"I hope," Devant put in, "that Case will consent to instruct in acrobatics. I understand that he knows some techniques that might very well clinch the next Inter-Tricennicm Games for us."

"Suits me," Case grunted.

AND you, Chester," Norgo inquired. "What skills do you think you'd like to ply among us?"

"Well," said Chester, considering, "I . . . ah . . . majored in Liberal Arts."

You paint, perhaps?"

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"No, nothing like that. Business Administration."

"I don't think I've heard of that. Is it a game of skill, or chance?"

"Both." Chester smiled patiently. "No, in Biz Ad we're taught how to manage large commercial enterprises."

"I see. And after receiving your training you went on to actual management of some such organization?"

"Well, no. Funny, but I could not seem to find any big businessmen who were looking for a fresh college graduate to tell them how to run their companies."

"Perhaps we'd better try something else. What about handicrafts? We value the manual skills highly here, Chester."

"Oh, I've done a lot of that. Built a plastic boll weevil only last month. Over two hundred interlocking parts—"

"You made the parts from plastic?"

"No. I bought a kit. But—"

"Perhaps in the field of sports?" Norgo suggested.

"That's right," urged Genie. "As a college graduate you must have a wide experience of games of all sorts."

Chester blushed. "Well, of course I was a great fan of outdoor activities, but I never actually *played*. I was always in the stands rooting."

"Chester, didn't you ever have a job?" Case asked impatiently. "I know you had enough pocket money so you didn't have to work for a living, but . . ."

"As a matter of fact, I did work one summer in a factory. I was an instrument spot-checker. I made sure the controls that worked the automatic machinery were working right."

"This involved mechanical skills?" Vasawalie enquired.

"If anything had gone wrong with the TV scanner that actually did the job, I was on the spot to see that the back-up scanner took over."

"You activated the emergency equipment, in other words?"

"No, it was automatic. But I assure you, the Union regarded my job as essential."

"How about hobbies, Chester?"

"I built model airplanes as a boy," said Chester.

"I've seen some pretty fancy models," said Case. "Now if you could show these folks how to build a radio-controlled job with a six-foot span—"

"I'm sorry; I never progressed as far as that."

"What about these little ships that do stunts, or go up to a hundred and fifty MPH—"

"I'm afraid my experience was limited to rather modest rubber-powered craft."

"What sort of craft are you

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discussing?" asked Devant. Chester explained.

"You mean they navigate without the assistance of rotors?"

"That's right."

"I doubt . . ." Vasawalie began.

"Give me a sheet of paper." Chester folded a simple glider, launched it out over the pool. It circled back to a safe landing on the grass.

"Remarkable! Perhaps this specialty would be acceptable." Norgo, Devant, and Vasawalie discussed the matter briefly.

"It's agreed, then," said Norgo. "I will assume your sponsorship, Chester. Your specialty should be a valuable addition to our program for the scientifically inclined.

"Now I suggest that our guests be shown round the Tricennium and given quarters. Shall we meet at the picnic ground later in the afternoon? The cooking competition ought to be interesting, and Rondle is supposed to have something unusual in the way of fireworks."

THE party moved out toward the street. "We were fortunate to arrive at the moment we did," Chester said to Case, as they followed the local elders from the terrace. "We fell in with the Town Council and saved a lot of red tape."

"I think any three citizens could have handled it," said Case. "That's one of the advantages of this size town: everybody in it has to take over part of the job of running things."

Devant fell back beside Case and Chester. "I wonder if you'd mind going along with me to the Center, Case. I'd like to arrange for you to start classes. To begin with, I'd suggest three sessions a day . . ."

"I must hurry," said Vasawalie. "There's a Randomist meeting that I ought to look in on . . ."

"Chester," Genie called, "I'm going to look at some waveform correlation analyses Norgo has been telling me about. I'll meet you later at the picnic."

"Certainly," said Chester. "And if anybody needs me, I'll be down in the park flying my glider."

* * *

It was an hour after dusk. Chester sat at a table with Case and Genie by the dancing terrace at the edge of the Meadow of the Moon.

"It's been a wonderful week," said Genie. "I never dreamed there was as much to learn just from studying probability curves. It's fascinating. I wish you'd come with me tomorrow, Chester. I think you'd be interested. Devant is a wonderful teacher."

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"No, thanks, Genie. I'm afraid all that sort of theorizing is over my head. Looking at a collection of graphs would only put me to sleep."

"But this isn't like that, Chester. There are so many aspects of existence that are susceptible to analytical treatment in the light of probability theory. We're accustomed to thinking of statistics as something that extends over a few years at best. Even such simple records as births and deaths only go back a few centuries. You'd be astonished at some of the empirical findings that have come out of statistical analysis of data representing thousands of years of record-keeping. Do you know that Devant can tell you precisely what the temperatures will be for everyday of the next year with an accuracy of ninety-nine percent?"

"I wouldn't want to plan a picnic on that basis."

"It would be perfectly safe if you know the long-range patterns. The climate is steadily growing warmer, you know. The peak of the last ice age was only seven thousand years ago—"

"I understood it was more like twenty thousand."

"Twenty thousand years ago the climate was warmer than it is now; don't you remember?"

"How could our geologists be so far off?'

"I'm afraid the science I learned before I came here was very inaccurate. All the ideas of cosmology, the ice ages, the origin of the moon, the age of the earth and planets: they're all wrong."

"Our scientists seemed to do pretty well when it came to building things like nuclear bombs and airplanes and satellites."

"The truly physical sciences are much older than the new speculative sciences, such as geology."

"I never heard geology called a speculative science."

"Oh, yes, indeed, it's a new science—like archaeology and anthropology and psychology. The data gathered by geologists are, of course, concrete enough. But their interpretations in the past were necessarily highly fanciful. People are accustomed to accepting the well-established lore of physics and mathematics and chemistry and medicine, developed through the centuries. Those are concrete facts you can observe in the laboratory or in everyday life. But the tendency was to extend that same confidence, by analogy, to new, hypothetical ideas that were proposed in the infancy of the new sciences. Hasty preliminary interpretations became dogma almost overnight. Now, if a new hypothesis is offered to explain, for example, the evidences of a very re-

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cently ice-free Antarctica, we as representatives of that tradition-bound school would be prone to scoff, because, in our world, it was so widely accepted that the South Pole has been in its present location, and frozen, for eons. And why? Because that was the simple assumption of its discoverers."

Case could see the dazed look gradually growing in Chester's eyes. "Look," he said. "If you don't want to take up graph-reading, come along with me tomorrow. I'll fit you into one of my classes and get you started on gymnastics."

"I'm afraid I'm not athletically inclined, Case. Nature intended me to be the frail, sensitive type. Besides, I have my model glider fans to think of."

Dinner arrived. Chester sighed and ate heartily.

VIII

"I'VE been here a month now," said Chester dejectedly, sitting across the table from Norgo at Kone's. "Every day I've tootled off to the park to show interested parties how to hand-launch model aircraft. While I agree it's a very wholesome activity, on the whole it seems to lack something. Everyone else is doing something useful or ornamental or even vital. Genie's been tied up with you and Devant and your electronics affairs, and Case spends all his time with the confounded student acrobats and wrestlers And everybody else too: all working on their Specialties, and when they're not doing that, off hiking or sculpting or skiing or playing the flute."

"They all have their periods of repose," said Norgo.

"Even their repose makes me feel inadequate. They lie around in the sun looking like Greek gods or goddesses, as the case may be. Everyone is good at any sport you could mention . . . and a few you couldn't. And they're all high-grade geniuses. I realize I can't compete with them . . . but I would like to be able to understand what they're talking about—or take my shirt off in public without feeling like a living argument for birth control."

Norgo drummed his fingers on the table. "I understand your feelings, Chester. You've seen your companions assume responsible rôles in the Tricennium while you devote your time to miniature flying machines. I can appreciate that the activity would hardly satisfy your unusual need for self-assertion."

"I want to better myself. Does that constitute megalomania?"

"You've attracted wide attention with your flying toys, Chester. A number of our most respected thinkers and artisans are

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among your pupils. And work is nearing completion on a full-scale machine embodying your principles."

"And I still feel like an underdeveloped ignoramus. Norgo, you've got to find something better for me to do."

"You're really dissatisfied here, Chester?"

"Yes. There's no earthly possibility that I can see of getting back to my own world, and in yours I'm just a second-class citizen." Norgo picked at his pastry, looking troubled. "You feel that strongly about it?"

"I'm getting desperate, Norgo. Every day is the same: an idle round of time-killing activities."

"Chester, do you know what our most important natural resource is?" said Norgo abruptly.

"Eh? Why, no. What has that to do with my problem?"

NORGO hitched his chair closer to the table. "Do you know how often a truly superior intellect is born? how often normal parents give birth to an authentic genius?"

"Not very often, I guess. Perhaps once in a few thousand births."

"Once in four million, five hundred and thirty three thousand, two hundred and four births, at the latest reckoning. That figure has remained fairly constant over the twelve thousand years or so that accurate records have been maintained on the subject. No amount of selective breeding or specialized training has succeeded in altering that.

"Even with a world population of close to half a billion, the present figure, the rules of probability allow for the presence among us of only one hundred such gifted persons. And so you know what percentage of these superior individuals are fortunate enough to encounter precisely the proper environmental conditions, conditions conducive to the abilities?"

"I'd guess about—"

"Not one percent," Norgo said flatly.

"Very interesting. But to get back to—"

"If we were content," Norgo pressed on, "to allow unrestrictive increase in the population, we might, one could reason, improve this situation. Today we have, if we are fortunate, one fully functioning genius at work in a productive field. With a tenfold increase in population, that number should increase to ten, you say."

"I didn't say, but—"

"Not so! Environmental factors would deteriorate due to overcrowded conditions. The thousand latent geniuses would find less opportunity to evolve their talents; and with luck we

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would end with perhaps still only a single fully functioning superior mind . . . at the cost of overcrowding, discomfort, want, social deterioration."

"That hardly seems—"

"The true function of the mass of the population, cosmodynamically speaking, is the production, by their sheer numbers, of the occasional genius—who alone has the ability to add a tiny increment to human progress."

"That's exaggerated, Norgo. Everybody adds a little something."

Norgo shook his head sadly. "They merely exercise the techniques already inherent in the culture. True, if all the knowledge already gathered were put to total use, tremendous superficial advance would in time ensue. We have in our libraries vast funds of facts which require proper correlation and analysis in order for us to benefit fully from them. A rare herb whose qualities were known and an obscure compound, described and forgotten in the course of routine research, were brought together; the result was a cheap and simple cure for cancer. Many more such trifles of technique await our cataloging of known facts. And in the cataloging new, secondary facts will come to light. But in the end, without the contributions of genius, the chain of discovery would die out. The perceived universe will have been exhausted, the ground reduced to sterility.

WE need the rare and—to the ordinary man—incomprehensible mind which can look into the night sky and conceive the truth of natural law, the mind which can scan the array of logically unrelated phenomena—and grasp a strange new pattern. Those are the minds which provide the new universes to conquer when we have mined the old to exhaustion."

"I thought you people weren't concerned with progress. Devant explained to me that you didn't consider industrialization, mechanization, automation, space exploration important."

"Ah!" Norgo raised a finger. "These things are, admittedly, not trivia, to be rejected without due reflection; but the question is one of *relative* importance. It was vital, true, to achieve a level of technology which would free our people from drudgery which could equally well be performed by mindless machines. But we have no wish to eliminate our wood-workers, our silversmiths, our sculptors. We must, if we are to progress—and I refer to the greater biological progress, not a unilinear mechanical over-specialization—, make it possible for our geniuses to emerge and function. How can this best be

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done? By relieving them of the burden of the routine, even though that routine be the most abstruse of mathematical research, the most delicate of analytical experimentation. Geniuses deal not in facts but in relationships. To this end, every member of the Tricennium must function at the maximum level of which he is potentially capable. This, Chester, is the objective of our educational system.

"Now, you may have wondered why our young people spend so many hours in physical pursuits, in the arts, in dancing, the carving of wood, the working of metals. Why should a potential genius risk his life on a tight-rope or a trapeze? Why should a superior mind devote itself to the molding of clay? Because we do not know, Chester, in what quarter the next great advance may be made. And because only a human organism working as a whole at the peak of its potential is truly capable of the highest functions. We cannot afford to allow one talent to go unrecognized, one skill unused."

"But you said that the function of the population is to produce geniuses. Why? So they can add their bit to improve the lot of the population whose only function—"

"You make the error of circular reasoning, Chester. What is the aim of life? Is it to grow to maturity so that one can produce young and nurture them so that they in turn can grow to maturity and produce young who in turn—"

"That's what I meant. I hope there's more to it than that."

"There is." Norgo smiled triumphantly. "Life is a dynamic process. To contribute to that dynamism is a purpose worthy of all our efforts. We do not know what the future of man may be—but you may depend on it: the steady effort of nature, over the past million years, to evolve a biophysical type embodying the supremacy of mind over the merely chemical does not end with us. No, we are, I fear, only an awkward transitional form, nine tenths animal, but—cruelly, perhaps—able to perceive the existence of the other tenth. We can aspire to, but never attain, in our own clumsy bodies, that transcendent state of total control of the mind, the spirit, over the gross animal impulses which we needed once—and need still, on occasion, to preserve ourselves in a natural world of blind ferocity."

THAT'S a pretty discouraging view of things."

"Not so. We as individuals cannot aspire to see the end, if there can be an end, even theoretically, to a force so irresistibly dynamic as evolving life. But we

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can take our satisfaction in playing our individual parts."

"But what does it all mean?"

"Life is not an engineering project, Chester. It is a work of art. Do you ask for the meaning of a symphony? Are the patterns of sunset clouds, or the rustle of green foliage on a summer day, or the perfume of nightflowers also required to spell out cures for bunions? A work of art is sufficient in itself."

"You're confusing two types of phenomena. Symphonies are deliberate, planned artifacts of man, while sunset clouds are accidental configurations which we happen to find esthetically pleasing. If you were to assign Life to one category or the other, you would have inevitably to class it with the latter. Men are no more responsible for Life than they are for a sunset—and they can influence it to just about the same extent."

"The point is well taken, Chester," said Norgo. "But there is one force in the universe that can stand against the blind pressures of nature. And that force is the will of Man."

"We've gotten a long way from my original question. Can't you find something for me to do?"

"I have stressed the importance of wide and diversified training," Norgo went on imperturbably, "In order to insure optimum conditions for the flourishing genius. But of course our people all begin on the first day of life the all-important business of total education." He studied Chester's face seriously. "I have long been interested in the purely theoretical problem of the reaction of a mature but untrained mind to exposure to a full modern education, in concentrated form. How would the organism react to this traumatic experience? After perhaps twenty five years of indolence, laziness, carelessness, minimal demand, suddenly to be called upon to flower, to develop fully every latent faculty. The pressure, of course, would be tremendous. Would the mind or body break under the stress? Where would the first points of weakness appear? In which areas would be encountered the gravest difficulties? Believe me, Chester, the results of such an experiment would be of the most profound importance."

"Yes, I can see they would."

NORGO nodded slowly. "I have never before had an opportunity to put my theories to the test. As I have said, our young people are exposed from birth to all the influences of our society. It is impossible for me to discover which mature traits are the result of this or that feature of the training and which they derive from the general cultural

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heritage. You, on the other hand, while possessed of a normal potential, are, beyond the simple abilities to talk and feed yourself, plus a few fringe accomplishments, you are, I say, virtually totally untrained. Your body is weak and flabby, your will untried, your mind unused—"

"Wait just a minute! I may not be—"

"Norgo held up his hand. "No offense intended, I assure you, Chester. You are in no way responsible for the inadequacies of your education. The point at issue is this: I need a subject for my experiment. You desire a worthwhile task. Perhaps the two needs are complementary."

"You mean you want to put me through the regular Tricennium eduation, at an accelerated pace."

"That is correct." Norgo nodded. "I warn you, the pressures will be extreme."

"How long would you plan for it to take?"

"There is, actually, no end to the process of education. But the formal phase normally requires the first twenty years of a student's life. By the use of the most advanced clinical techniques, I would attempt to accomplish the same with you in . . . one year."

"A year? That sounds like a long time . . . but much too short to do what you describe."

"If you accept, it will seem like a very long year indeed."

"Well . . . I haven't anything else pressing to do. And this will include some physical building-up too?"

"Most assuredly. The development of mind and body are inextricably intertwined. But I must warn you: this program will in no way be an easy one."

"Don't worry," said Chester. "I'm not expecting it to be effortless. After all, your people are a pretty brilliant crowd. I can't expect to feel comfortable with them unless I put in some pretty full days."

"The days we will work with will contain twenty four hours each. Your training will occupy every second of every minute of each of those hours."

"Lead on, Norgo. You can send word to the park that the glider throwers are on their own now."

LESS than three hours later Chester and Norgo clambered down from the open cockpits of the heli in which they had flown out from the Center. Chester looked around at a long sweep of meadow, wooded hills, and a low white building that covered a quarter acre near the crest of the slope. Cut in the white stone above the entry were the words: IS NOT IS NOT NOT IS . . .

"This is about where the village used to be," Chester mur-

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mured. "Highway 98 went right along the valley . . ."

"Eh?" said Norgo.

"Nothing. What is this place?"

"One of our Research Centers. A man named Kuve is in charge here—a brilliant theorist."

"Rather isolated, isn't it?"

"It's best that there be no distractions. The center is self-sufficient."

"I see smoke over in the hills. Who lives there?"

"An Overage settlement. There are a number in this region. The hunting and fishing, you know."

"I used to be quite a fisherman. Perhaps I'll have an opportunity—"

"I wouldn't recommend it, Chester." Norgo smiled. He led the way across the grass and into a large room of the white building. In contrast to the white marble floor, mosaics stood out in brilliant color upon the white walls.

"Kuve is one of my best young assistants," said Norgo. "He'll take charge personally of your training.

A tall young man with pale blond hair and a square jaw approached through an open archway. He greeted Norgo, studied Chester appraisingly. Norgo made introductions.

"So this is to be my subject," Kuve said. "Remove your shirt and trousers, please."

"Right here and now? I was hoping you'd tell me a little—"

"Please co-operate with Kuve," said Norgo. "He's planned your schedule closely."

"There'll be little opportunity for random activities," Kuve added. "I'll be your constant companion for this phase of your training. There will be no other students. There will be no opportunity for coffee or strolls; your schedule has been planned in advance. You will become acquainted with the plant as necessary."

Chester slowly pulled off his shirt. "It sounds like a strange sort of school. How often will I be able to get back to town? I didn't have a chance to see Case or Genie. Will you let them know I'm here, Norgo?"

"They will be notified of your arrival." Kuve looked him over carefully.

"Chester, you're going to make a fascinating project," Kuve said approvingly. "Norgo wasn't exaggerating. Almost complete atrophy of the musculature, obvious limited articulation, minimal lung capacity, poor skin tone, barely sub-pathenogenic posture—"

"Well, I'm sorry if I don't come up to your expectations."

"Oh, you do indeed. You even exceed them. But don't be concerned. I've worked out a complete developmental scheme for you—"

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"That's fast work. I only heard about this project today. It has not been three hours since I volunteered."

"Yes, but naturally a month ago, when Norgo told me—"

"Norgo told you?" Chester looked around for his sponsor. "Where is he? He was standing here just a moment ago."

"Norgo has many concerns, Chester. Now—"

"And you've known for a month that I'd be coming here?"

"Norgo felt sure that in time you'd grow dissatisfied with your idleness."

"And I thought I was volunteering. I see now why I was elected hand-launched-glider king. Can I put my clothes back on now?"

"You'll have no need for these garments." Kuve took Chester's rumpled suit. "Please follow me."

CHESTER trailed Kuve along a wide corridor to a small room lined with wall cabinets. Kuve waved him to a chair, took a dome-shaped apparatus from a shelf and fitted it over Chester's head.

"What's this, a hair dryer?" Chester felt a sharp tingling sensation. Kuve removed the device. Chester felt a cool breeze over his skull. He put a hand up.

"I'm scalped!" he yelped. "What the devil is the idea—"

"This treatment will inhibit hair growth for six months, during which time revitalization proceeds." Kuve pointed to a cupboard. "You will find garments there. Please put them on."

Chester squeezed into a pair of trunks, laced on sandals, and stood. "Is this all I get? I feel like the New Year."

A shapely young woman in a white kilt entered the room. She smiled at Chester, took a case of instruments from a cabinet, and reached for his hand. "I'm Mina. I'm going to trim your nails back and apply a growth-retarding agent," she said cheerfully. "Hold still now."

"What's this for?"

"Excessively long hair and nails would be a painful nuisance in some of the training," said Kuve. "Now, Chester, I want to ask you something." He drew up a chair and seated himself beside the girl, facing Chester.

"What is pain?" he said.

"It's . . . um . . . an unpleasant physical sensation."

"Is nausea pain?"

"No. Pain is more concentrated. It's—uh—a feeling that comes from damage to the body."

"Nearly right, Chester. Pain is based on *fear* of damage to the body. Sometimes that fear is justified, sometimes not. What would otherwise be interpreted as a pain sensation can be tol-

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erated easily, even ignored, when it is accepted emotionally as harmless." Kuve rose, went to a wall shelf, brought back a small metal article.

"Do you know what this is?"

Chester looked at it. "No."

"A manual shaving device, once in daily use. This sharp-edged blade was drawn over the skin of the face, cutting the hairs."

"I've heard of such things. Razors, they were called. I'm glad I live in modern times."

"I've made a number of experiments with this instrument, under varying conditions of temperature, blade keenness, lubricant effectiveness. Under optimum conditions, the process of removing a single day's growth of facial hair occasioned a pain level of .2 agons; not unendurable, but hardly soothing. Under merely average conditions, however, the level quickly rose to .8 agons, roughly equal to the sensation level produced by the removal of a fingernail with pincers. And yet these pain levels were endured almost unnoticed, daily, by millions of men over a period of thousands of years."

"It's amazing what people will put up with, all right," Chester said.

"Are your feet perfectly comfortable, Chester?"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't they be?"

"You have callus tissue on both feet, as well as deformities caused by constricting footwear."

"Well, melon-slicers may not be the most—"

"In order to have produced these conditions, you must have endured pain on the order of .5 agons continuously, for months and years. Yet probably you sellom noticed it."

"Why notice it? There was nothing I could do about it."

"Exactly. Pain is not an absolute; it is a state of mind—which you can learn to disregard."

Kuve reached out, pinched the skin on Chester's thigh. "Is this painful?"

Chester watched Kuve's hand doubtfully. "Noo . . ." He said, slowly.

Kuve squeezed harder. "You can see that I'm merely pressing with very moderate force. You are in no danger of injury."

"Is that a promise?" said Chester nervously.

"Now close your eyes." Chester squeezed his eyes shut. "Concentrate on the sensation of undergoing an amputation of the leg—without anesthetic. The knife slicing through the flesh, the saw attacking the living bone—"

Chester squirmed in the chair. "Hey, that hurts! You're bearing down too hard!"

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KUVE released his grip. "I squeezed no harder, Chester. The association of the idea of injury simply intensified the sensation. The pain you felt was purely subjective. You paid no attention whatever to Mina when she applied a measured stimulus of .4 agons to the exposed cuticle of your finger while I held your attention. You accepted the twinges of a manicure as normal and non-injurious."

Chester rubbed his thigh. "The leg still hurts. I'll have a bruise tomorrow."

"You may." Kuve nodded. "The control of the mind over bodily functions—including the production of bruises—is extensive. We'll go into that thoroughly, later in your training."

Mina finished, flashed a smile at Chester, and left the room.

"Let's move along to the gymnasium," said Kuve. He led the way to a larger room, high-ceilinged and fitted with gymnastic equipment. "Before we begin your physical training," he said, "there is another question I'd like you to consider."

"Usually the questions come at the end of a course, but go ahead."

Kuve looked at Chester. "What is fear?"

"It's . . . uh . . . the feeling you get when you're in danger."

"Or when you *think* you're in danger. It is the feeling that arises when you are unsure of your own capability to meet a situation."

"You're wrong on that one, Kuve. If a Bengal tiger walked in here I'd be scared, no matter what my capabilities were."

"Look around you; what would you actually do if a wild beast did in fact enter this room?"

"Well—I'd run . . ."

"Where?"

Chester studied the room. "It wouldn't do any good to start off down the hall; there's no door to stop whatever was chasing me. I think I'd take to that rope there." He pointed to a knotted fifty-foot cable suspended from among high rafters.

"An excellent decision—"

"But I doubt if I could climb it."

"So you are unsure of your capabilities." Kuve smiled. "But try, Chester. Perhaps you can climb it."

CHESTER went to the rope, looked at it doubtfully. Kuve muttered into a wrist communicator. Chester grasped the rope, pulled himself up, wrapped his legs around the rope, wriggled higher.

"This is . . . the best I can . . . do," he puffed, his feet six feet above the floor. He slid back down. "I'm just not in trim—"

There was a sound like water gurgling down a drain. Chester

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turned quickly. An immense tan mountain lion paced toward him, yellow eyes alight, a growl rumbling from its throat. With a yell Chester leaped for the rope, swarmed halfway to the distant rafters, and clung, looking down. Kuve patted the sleek head of the animal; it yawned, nuzzling his leg affectionately.

"You see? You were capable of more than you imagined," Kuve called matter-of-factly.

"Where did that thing come from? That was a scoundrelly trick, Kuve. What if I hadn't been able to climb the rope after all?"

"He's quite harmless. A pet, one of several we use in our various training programs. When you mentioned a tiger, I couldn't resist the opportunity to make an object lesson."

Chester slid down the rope slowly, eyes on the cat. Back on the floor, he edged behind Kuve, who slapped the animal's flank. The cat padded away.

"You see?" said Kuve. "If I called him back, you wouldn't panic now, because you know he's harmless. And if a really wild animal were released here, you'd know what to do—and that you were capable of doing it. You could watch the Bengal tiger you mentioned quite calmly—and take to the rope only if necessary."

"Maybe—but don't try me."

"Look at your hands, Chester."

Chester examined his palms. "Your little joke cost me some skin."

"Did you notice that—at the time?"

"All I was thinking about was that man-eater."

"The fear and pain reactions are useful to the unthinking orgamism. But you have a reasoning mind, Chester. You could dispense with the automatic-response syndromes."

"It's better to be a live coward—"

"But you might be a dead coward, when mastery of the fear could have saved you. Look down, Chester."

Chester glanced at the floor. As he watched the milky white surface cleared to transparency, all but a narrow ribbon, scarcely four inches wide, leading to apparently solid floor across the room. Chester stared in horror at a yawning abyss below his feet set with jagged black rocks. Kuve stood by unconcernedly, apparently suspended in mid-air.

"It's quite all right, Chester. Merely a floor of very low reflectivity."

Chester teetered on the narrow strip. "Get me out of here," he gasped.

"Can't you walk across to the far side?" Kuve inquired casually.

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Chester took an uncertain step, edged a foot or two along the opaque ribbon. Perspiration popped out on his forehead. "I'm afraid of heights . . ." he gasped. "Turn it off!"

"Close your eyes," Kuve said quietly. Chester crouched, eyes shut.

"Forget what you saw," Kuve ordered. "Concentrate on sensing the floor through your feet. Accept its solidity."

Chester swallowed, then opened his eyes slowly. He looked at Kuve. "I guess it will hold," he said shakily.

Kuve's stern expression softened into a faint smile. "Chester," he said, "I think you're going to be a good pupil."

WHEN weather permits," said Kuve, "you'll do your work-outs here on the terrace in the open air."

Chester surveyed the hundred-foot square area, floored with dark wood and surrounded by a five-foot wall over which leaned flowering shrubs. A cluster of tall poplars shaded a portion of the floor from the high morning sun. Racked against the low wall were an array of weights.

"Perhaps I should explain that I have no aspirations to the Mr. Universe title," he said. "I think perhaps a couple of Indian clubs would be more than adequate for me."

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"Chester," said Kuve, motioning his pupil to a padded bench. "We have taken the first steps toward dispelling your certainty that pain is unendurable and that fear is both useful and overmastering. Now let us consider the rôle of boredom as a hindrance to the control of the intellect over the body. What is boredom, Chester?"

"Well, boredom sets in when you have nothing to occupy your mind."

"Or when instinct says, 'The activity at hand is not vital to my survival'. It is a more potent factor in influencing human behavior than either fear or pain." He handed Chester a small dumbbell. "Do you find that heavy?"

Chester weighed the five-pound weight in his hand. "No, not really."

"Have another." Chester hefted a dumbbell in each hand. "Now," said Kuve, "please stand and place the two weights at shoulder height. Then press them alternately to arm's length."

Chester raised the weights, pushed up first one, then the other. Kuve watched. Chester worked steadily, his face growing red.

"You're slowing down. Are you getting tired?"

"Of course I'm getting tired! How long does this go on?"

"A little longer. All the way up, please."

Chester thrust the weights up, puffing harder now. His pace grew slower.

"You're tiring, Chester," Kuve said, seating himself comfortably in a canvas chair. "You'd like to stop now. But ask yourself: why?"

"Because . . . I'm getting . . . exhausted . . ." Chester gasped.

"Exhaustion could result in your failure to press the weight up, but it fails to explain the mere desire to stop while strength remains."

"It hurts!" Chester grated through clenched teeth. "My arms and shoulders are on fire!"

"No," said Kuve, "you're bored. Your body is saying, in effect: this is accomplishing nothing; it is uninteresting; it is not worth doing. Therefore you feel the impulse to stop. The instinct of laziness is nature's automism for conserving energy vital to the hunt or to flight or combat or mating. But we can disregard those motives. From now on I'll expect you to recognize boredom as a destructive force—and reject its control of your motivations."

IT was late afternoon. Chester let his hand fall from the hand grip of the machine which he had been squeezing, twisting,

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pulling and pushing at Kuve's direction.

"I thought you were exaggerating when you said you were going to test a hundred and seventy two different muscles, but I believe you now. Every one of them is aching."

"They'll ache even more tomorrow," Kuve said cheerfully. "But no matter. They'll soon accustom themselves to the idea that you intend to call on them henceforward. You'll find them very co-operative; they'll adapt quickly to daily exertion."

"I'll never make it. The thought of doing this again tomorrow appalls me."

"Put it out of your mind. At the proper time you'll go through the schedule I've laid out for you. When it's over forget it until it's time to work again."

"I haven't got the will power," Chester said. "I know myself. I've tried diets and daily dozens before, to say nothing of night classes in which I was going to learn flawless French or ancient history. I never lasted."

"You'll last this time. The secret of winning arguments with yourself is to refuse to argue. While you're marshalling your excuses for skipping a day, start down the hall toward the training room. By the time you've finished perfecting your argument you'll be well into your routine."

"You'll have to give me an easier schedule—and you'll have to keep prodding me—"

"Your schedule will be tailored to your demonstrated abilities. That was the reason for the tests. My function ends with showing you the way. The rest you must do for yourself. There is nothing you can learn here more important than that. Now let's move along to the dining room. I have a briefing on mnemonics for you, after which I'll start you on pattern theory. Then—"

"When do I sleep?"

"All in good time."

"It's curious," Chester said, finishing off a bowl of tasty clear soup, "but I forgot all about lunch. I have a wonderful appetite now, though. What's next on the menu?"

"Nothing," said Kuve. "And please don't interrupt the lecture. As I was saying, the association of symbol with specific must relate to your personal experience."

"What do you mean, nothing? I'm a hungry man. I've worked like a draft horse all day!"

"You're overweight, Chester. The soup was carefully compounded to supply the needed nutrients to maintain your energy level. In time, as you adapt to the higher energy demands of the program, you'll evolve a higher metabolic rate. Your ration will be increased according-

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ly. This is the key to development of the positive attitude pattern necessary to maintain the activity level of a fully functioning organism."

"But I'll starve."

"You've been eating from boredom, Chester. When your attention is occupied elsewhere, you forget food. Only habit is demanding that you overeat. You'll have to master habit."

"Back to that again. This whole day has consisted of your telling me to mortify the flesh, mind over matter—"

"The objective is not to eliminate the impulses of the flesh, but to control and use them. The mind is the supreme instrument in nature; it must establish its supremacy. I asked you earlier what pain was. What is pleasure?"

"Right now, it's eating! I—"

"An excellent example: the satisfaction of a natural impulse."

"It's more than an impulse. It's a necessity!"

"Overeating injures the body. So it is with all pleasure impulses. When over-satisfied, they become destructive."

"What am I supposed to do, suppress my normal instinct and act like a machine?"

"Not at all; the instincts can be very useful. Anger, for example. Here nature has provided a behavioral mechanism to deal with those situations in which aggression seems indicated. It's a very strong emotion; it can override other impulses, such as fear. When you are angry, you are stronger, less sensitive to pain, and immune to panic. You desire only to close with your enemy and kill. Even the lower animals have learned that. Before combat males of many species customarily set about working themselves up into a rage—"

"I've always read that if you can get your opponent mad, you can outfight him."

"An exaggeration, but it has an element of truth. An angry man can become careless. You'll learn to control the anger impulse, and evoke it at will without losing control.

"Now we must move on to the next training situation. There's a great deal of ground still to be covered today."

"I need a few hours to think over all this before I go to bed," Chester protested. "Besides which, I'm exhausted."

"The laziness instinct again," said Kuve. "Come along, Chester."

THE sun was setting. Chester and Kuve stood at the base of a fifty-foot tower beside a pool. A steep flight of steps led to a lonely platform at the top.

"Climb to the top of the tower," Kuve said. He handed Chester a

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small locket. "This is a communicator which will enable me to talk to you at a distance. Tomorrow a similar device will be surgically implanted. Now, up you go."

"I don't like heights."

"Remember your lessons, Chester. Climb slowly and steadily."

"What if I lose my balance?"

"You won't."

"What's the point in risking my neck up there?"

"Chester, intellectually you are aware that you should cooperate with me. Ignore the distractions of instinct and follow your mind."

"I'll freeze on the ladder. You'll end by having to climb up and get me."

"Chester, remembered moments of high achievement satisfy; remembered excesses disgust. Next week will you look back with pleasure on having refused the tower?"

Chester shook his head.

"But if you climb it now, later the recollection will give you great pride. You have the power to mold your memories—but only before they become memories. This is your opportunity to endow yourself with a recollection worth having."

Chester put a foot on the first step.

"I'll start, but I won't guarantee I'll go all the way."

"One step at a time, Chester. Don't look down."

Chester mounted the stairs cautiously, gripping the slender hand-rail. "This thing wobbles," he called back from ten feet up.

"It will hold. Just keep going."

Chester moved higher. The steps were of wood, eight inches wide and four feet long. The hand-rail was aluminum, bolted to uprights every fourth step. Chester concentrated his attention on the wood and metal. A buzz sounded from the locket at his throat. "You're doing very well. Halfway up now . . ." Beyond the steps before his face, the sunset sky flared purple and orange. Chester paused, breathing hard.

"A few more steps, Chester," said the tiny voice in the communicator. He went on. The top of the tower was before him now. Clinging to the rail, he made his way up the last few steps to the platform. A cool wind blew across his shaved head. Far away a twinkle of light showed against the dark forest on the skyline. Red light reflected from a river winding down the valley. The low white building of the Center glowed peach-colored in the fading light. Chester looked down at the pool below—

He froze, clinging to the rail.

"Lie down!" Kuve's voice snapped. Chester lowered himself rigidly.

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"Move to the steps . . . feet first. Lower your legs, then start down!"

Chester felt the first step under his foot, edged down, one step at a time . . .

"Halfway down," Kuve's voice said. Chester was moving faster now. At ten feet from the bottom, Kuve halted him.

"Look at the water. Can you jump in from there?"

"Certainly."

"Go back up a step. Can you jump from there?"

Chester balked three steps higher. "This is high enough."

"Jump." Chester held his nose and sprang into the water. He surfaced, climbed out of the pool.

"Do it again."

After three jumps Chester went a step higher. Half an hour later, in bright moonlight, he made the jump from twenty feet.

"That's enough for this session," said Kuve. "In a week you'll jump from the top—where you couldn't stand upright today. Now, back inside. While you're getting into some dry garments, I want to talk to you about the nature of reality."

* * *

"It seems like I've been here for a month," Chester said, as Kuve dimmed the lights on the pattern-response panel, "and I'm still on my first day. What are you doing, training me to go without sleep entirely?"

"Come along. I'll show you to your bed now."

In a narrow room with a high window, Chester looked critically at a padded bench three feet wide.

"I'm supposed to sleep on that?"

"There is no mattress like weariness," Kuve said.

Chester kicked off his sandals and lay down with a sigh. "I guess you're right at that, Kuve. I'm going to sleep for a week."

"Four hours," said Kuve. "In addition, you'll have a two-hour nap at noon."

There was a buzz from the communicator still on Chester's neck. "Not-is is not is-not," said a soft feminine voice.

"What's this gibberish?"

"You'll interpret this material at a subconscious level while you sleep. These are the basic axioms of rationality. Eventually they'll become integrated into your logic matrix."

Is this going on all night?"

"All night. But you'll find it doesn't interfere with sleep."

"I won't sleep a wink."

"If not tonight, then tomorrow."

"That's a cheering thought." Chester yawned, closed his eyes. He thought, "Only three hundred and sixty four days to go."

(Concluded next month)

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Illustrator ADKINS

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Plumrose, detective of the occult, returns with the case of Fernand Amador, who would not be balked of the girl he wanted if it took every ounce of elixir of acharat in the weird shops of Chinatown.

I WATCHED the rain bounce off the fully clothed cast iron Venus in the overgrown yard outside. It wasn't a compelling vista and I wandered away from the half shuttered window and over toward the deep fire place. The fire still seemed to be doing okay. The big dark clock in the corner of the study showed 9:25 on its face. I sat uneasily down in one of the twin bentwood rockers and studied the tableau of carved Civil War generals under the nearest bellglass. About thirty seconds of that was enough and I got up and went for the study door.

The door opened before I reached it and Edwin Plumrose entered. "Well?" I asked.

Plumrose was a large plump man. Pink faced with handsome white whiskers. The pockets of his art nouveau dressing gown were cluttered with clippings, folded sheets of heavy paper, ribbon wound scrolls. "The mouse only got as far as 1922," he said.

"Great," I said, going back and sitting down.

"Also the poor little fellow lost his tail out there somewhere," said Plumrose. "Perhaps there are realms best left untinkered with."

"I don't have a tail to lose. And you should have sworn off tinkering before you got me here."

"A very well read young lady owes her life to that little experiment," said Plumrose. "I had the impression that you had come to be quite fond of her after we solved the Case of the Nob Hill Fiend."

I shrugged. "Sure, Emily's all right. Except I feel uneasy about it. I mean here in 1897 she's great. But if I were in my right time spot, in 1961, she'd be 84 years old."

"An older woman can teach you a few tricks," said Plumrose, taking the other rocker.

"You know," I said, "if you're such a hot occult investigator I don't see why you can't whip up a different way to get me back to 1961."

"Now," said Plumrose. "The time ray got you here, didn't it? Simply because a small missetting of the dial got us somebody from the wrong year is no reason

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to turn against the machine. Your only legitimate cause for complaint is the fact that the time ray got banged up in your tussle with the Nob Hill Fiend."

"Okay. So how long is it going to take to get it working again?"

"From what you've told me of 1961," said Plumrose, "I can't understand why you simply don't dismiss it from your mind. I've given you a job as my assistant and secretary and, I hope, my future biographer. Stay here in 1897 and relax."

"I've got friends in 1961 and a good job. When that damn time ray of yours put the snatch on me I was on my way to coffee. By now I've set the world's record for long coffee breaks."

FROM the wet street outside came the sound of a buggy hurrying up. "Company?" said Plumrose, rising.

"Little early in the day for guests. I bet it's some client."

Mrs. Hoggins, Plumrose's housekeeper, answered the door and in a moment showed in a tall thin young man with light hair and an uninspiring moustache. I suppose the moustache was actually okay. I still wasn't used to living in such a hairy era as 1897.

"Which of you is Mr. Edwin Plumrose?" the young man asked, holding out his card.

Plumrose took the card. "I am Plumrose," he said. "Mr. Bert Willsey is my assistant."

"I see," the guy said.

Plumrose read from the card. "'Barry Todhunter, Bank Clerk'"

"What do you think of the card as a card?" Todhunter asked. "It's my first situation, you see. I wanted cards with a designation before this. However, Barry Todhunter, Unemployed Art Student, doesn't have an impressive ring, do you think?"

"My Uncle Randolph," said Plumrose, "who did much pioneer work in the field of upper case type always felt . . ."

"Did you have some kind of occult problem, Mr. Todhunter?" I cut in.

Todhunter glanced at the clock. "Yes, I'd better get to it. My employers at the bank don't know I've come here. They think I'm down in one of the vaults."

"My assistant," said Plumrose, sitting down in his striped love seat and motioning Todhunter into the empty rocker, "is sometimes too blunt. He comes from an area where good fellowship and leisurely talk are not valued. Since you are pressed, Mr. Todhunter, perhaps you had best explain your reason for consulting me."

"My fiancee," Todhunter began, "that is, my fiancee so I thought. Let me say simply that

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a Miss Elizabeth Walton, eldest daughter of Joseph Manley Walton, of this city, is in grave danger from supernatural sources." He hesitated. "There is, I must admit, the possibility that it is all a hoax on her family's part to unburden themselves of me. Mr. Walton is one of San Francisco's most respected brokers. It may be that I did not impress him sufficiently. Still to be a bank clerk at twenty six is not an accomplishment to be scorned."

"Take my Cousin Rupert," said Plumrose.

"What sort of supernatural trouble is it?" I asked Todhunter.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I've neglected to mention it thus far. The problem, gentlemen, is this. Miss Elizabeth Walton *may* be in danger of becoming the latest victim of a family curse."

Plumrose sat up. "A family curse? Of what sort?"

Lowering his head Todhunter said, "It's an unpleasant sort of curse. Then I suppose most curses are. At any rate, for well over one hundred years the eldest daughter in the Walton family has come to some violence on the eve of her twenty first birthday. This is one of those curses that got started back when the family lived in England, in a bleak castle."

"When's your girl friend's birthday coming up?" I asked.

"It will be this Saturday," said Todhunter, "which means the eve of her birthday will be tomorrow night. I wish they'd told me all this before I made reservations for dinner and bought a present for Elizabeth."

"You said earlier," put in Plumrose, "that you and Miss Walton were no longer engaged. What does this have to do with the curse?"

"You see," said Todhunter, "Elizabeth and I were never formally engaged. Further she had never mentioned this horrible ancestral curse to me. It seems, however, that all the other Walton girls who came to a bad end had been engaged to be married. Apparently Elizabeth's family felt that if they kept her from being seriously involved with any young man until after she was twenty one the curse would not harm her."

"How'd they find out you were engaged?" I asked him.

Todhunter drew a packet of letters from his coat. "Elizabeth's parents intercepted these and took to asking her questions. In the course of the questioning she admitted her situation in regard to me. The ridiculous thing is that I am not the author of these letters. That man, whoever he is, deserves a sound beating." He handed the bundle across to Plumrose.

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PLUMROSE undid the twine. "The Waltons have asked you to stay away from Elizabeth until she passes the dangerous birthday?"

"After they read those they don't want me back ever."

Plumrose took a letter from its envelope and skimmed it. "Very European in approach."

"Does Elizabeth know who really wrote them?" I asked.

"No, I'm certain she does not. We have no secrets and never lie to each other. We both prided ourselves that ours was a wholesome romance. Little good that does us now."

Plumrose mumbled something and took the letter over to the window. In the watery morning light he held it first at arm's length and then very close to his round blue eyes. "Tomorrow afternoon when you finish work at your bank," he said to Todhunter, "return here. My fee, in your case, will be fifteen dollars. Bring the money and I will see to it that Miss Walton comes to no harm from the curse."

"That's splendid," said Todhunter, jumping up. "Do you think you'll clear it up by eight? Or shall I cancel the dinner reservations?"

"Occult work doesn't keep regular hours," Plumrose said. "Don't make any plans."

"You can save Elizabeth, though, Mr. Plumrose?"

"I can," he answered, turning away.

Todhunter shook hands with me and rushed out and jumped into his buggy. He was soon gone down the rainy street.

"Suppose I give you my name on a card along with fifteen dollars in cash," I said to Plumrose's back. "Will you get me back to San Francisco, 1961."

"In the attic," he said. He was rubbing the letter thoughtfully across his beard.

"In the attic?"

"This writing," said Plumrose.

I moved up and looked at the letter. It didn't seem too bad to me, although flowery. "I would not be afraid of a guy who wrote like that."

"Not the content, but the style of handwriting," said Plumrose. He stuffed the letter and its mates in a cluttered pocket. "You can help me do some lifting. Come along, Willsey."

I was stuck in 1897. What else could I do. I went along to the attic.

WHEN I'd jumped back to dodge the falling mummy case I knocked into the zither-playing automaton.

The automaton resembled a cigarstore Indian trying to pass as a Gypsy woman. A kick in the side turned it off.

I worked my way around a

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confused pile of fetters and manacles and lifted an unloaded crossbow off a dusty black trunk. "You know," I said, "I'm pretty sure they tear this place of yours down in 1960 and build a ten story apartment house. All brick and glass."

"Flesh is like grass," he answered.

I got the trunk open and studied the top layer of its contents. The trunk seemed to be full of music manuscripts, all for Viennese waltzes. "Nothing in here but waltz music," I said.

"Down in the bottom."

I dug down. Under a lot of waltzes was a small black portfolio. I worked it out. When I opened it fragments of yellowed paper fluttered away and spiralled to the floor. Written in bold letters at the top of the first sheet was the word *Ouro*. "This might be what we're looking for," I said. "It's in Spanish or something."

"Portuguese," said Plumrose, grunting to his feet. He chuckled and squeezed over to me. "Yes. That's it. Fernand Amador's treatise on the transmutation of gold. At least the first few pages. Written in Lisbon in 1773, shortly before they ran him out."

While Plumrose got one of the love letters out of his robe pocket I said, "You could be right about this."

"Of course." He put the letter alongside the manuscript. "See there."

The handwriting was the same. "So does Fernand Amador have a time machine, too?"

Plumrose shook his head. He closed the portfolio and tucked it up under his arm. "Not so simple as that. We'll have our afternoon brandy after we clean up and I'll explain it to you."

I led the way out of the attic, stepping across the incomplete suit of sprawled armor and around the stack of gold braided band uniform hats.

AS YET the pockets of Plumrose's clean dressing gown were empty. He put his hands in them and paced a small line in front of the study fireplace. "A certain number of legends," he said, "turn out to be absolutely true. Fernand Amador has always been rumored a close friend of the reknowned Comte de St. Germain."

"Who?"

"St. Germain, the gentleman who claimed to be some 2000 years old. Perhaps old St. Germain was legitimate."

"You think St. Germain passed his secret on to Amador and that Fernand Amador is still alive? That he wrote those love letters to Miss Walton?"

"Either that or someone sent her a batch of old mail."

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"Hey," I said, "where did Amador go when he skipped Portugal?"

Plumrose smiled. "To England. Nothing is known of him after he left London, supposedly for Scotland, in 1805."

"Suppose he'd met the ancestor of Elizabeth Walton back in the late 1700s somewhere. Maybe she turned him down for somebody else and he did her in. Then he decided to give it another try and he came back the next generation."

"Only to be rejected by that eldest daughter, too."

"So Amador gets hooked with the idea and comes back over and over. And here he is in 1897 to try for Elizabeth Walton."

"That seems to make sense," said Plumrose. "It would imply a tremendous dedication to making headway with a Walton girl."

"We haven't met Elizabeth Walton yet. She may be great."

"I personally wouldn't devote 100 years to a project like this. If you're immortal it probably gives you a different point of view."

"Do you," I asked, "know where Amador might be? He's not this guy Todhunter, is he?"

"No," said Plumrose. He remembered his brandy and picked his glass from the mantle. "There's no resemblance for one thing. I've seen an old engraving of Amador someplace or other." He walked up close to the clock and studied it. "Nearly five. Too late for the sort of detective work I want you to do. Tomorrow first thing."

"I thought occult detectives preferred night work."

"I'll give you a list of shops and stores in which to make inquiries," said Plumrose.

"And that'll lead us to Fernand Amador in time to save Elizabeth Walton."

"Depending on how close he was to the Comte de St. Germain."

SAN FRANCISCO has always been a cosmopolitan city. But I was surprised to find that the shops Plumrose sent me to had ever existed. I still hadn't managed to work out the operation of a buggy so Plumrose hired a carriage for me. Plumrose stayed close to his study fireplace, doing research, while I clattered from Chinatown to South of the Slot to the Barbery Coast.

The morning had been thick with fog. A little before noon the fog cleared. When I got back to Plumrose's place, a good half hour too late to make lunch, the rain had started in again.

I ran up to the wrought iron gate and gave it a shove. It stuck, which was usual. So I climbed over and made my way

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up the narrow path that still showed between the tall grass and thick shrubbery of Plumrose's front yard. The heads of iron deer and midget Cupids were scattered here and there, poking up out of bushes and grass. Rain on the roof is okay but for real listening pleasure there's nothing like rain on a cast iron elk. I got up the porch of the two story Victorian house and used the gargoyle knocker.

Plumrose himself let me in. He was in another of his bright patterned lounging robes. "Quiet, Willsey," he said.

I shook myself out next to the umbrella rack and took off my muddy shoes. "Why?"

"Mrs. Hoggins is in a trance."

"Anything serious?" I asked, following him down the hall into his study.

"No," he said, "this is her afternoon off and she can do what she likes." He settled down on the striped loveseat. Nodding at the crackling fire he said, "Dry off some."

"Thanks." From the inside pocket of my 1897 suit I took a sheet of paper.

"You got a lead?"

"The place out in the Mission District," I said, checking my notes, "is sold out of balm of azoth. They tried to sell me carbonated maydew but I said no."

"Did you learn who bought the balm from them?"

"Finally, yes. A man named F. Orlando. No address."

"That's bad."

"Wait now. Your friend in Chinatown says he's had a real rush on elixir of acharat the past couple of years. The customer is F. Orlando. It's the same with the rest of the shops. The only guy who's buying up any noticable quantities of the ingredients that go into the elixir of life is this F. Orlando."

"Did any of the dealers have the man's residence listed?"

"No," I said, "but on the way back here I saw his address written on a brick wall on Sutter Street."

"That's convenient," said Plumrose, stroking his beard. "How did that happen?"

"F. Orlando runs a public bath house. Out by the ocean somewhere near The Cliff House from the looks of the address on the sign."

Plumrose nodded. "That would be a nice roomy place to carry out all the rituals necessary to maintain eternal life."

"I take it," I said, moving further from the fireplace as I dried off, "that you have to keep reapplying this eternal life treatment."

"Most authorities, including the Comte de St. Germain, seem to feel that way about it," said Plumrose.

"Look. If you know all these

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ingredients, why don't you whip up some of this elixir of life. Say you never get the time ray patched up. I can just take a drink of the elixir and wait around for 1961 to get here."

"You don't drink it," said Plumrose. "That is, you drink some of it. The chief problem is that while the ingredients are fairly well known the exact formulas and recipes that make them work are hadrer to come by. My Uncle Courtenay got the formula wrong and instead of making him young the stuff turned his hair white overnight."

"Aged him, huh?"

"No. What he'd ended up with was a simple bleach." Plumrose sighed. "The main thing needed, besides the formulas, is a philosopher's stone."

"None of the shops had one," I said. "Although that Egyptian lady under the Barbary Coast offered to put my name on a waiting list."

"Only Fernand Amador could wait long enough." Plumrose got up. "I believe I'll go soak in a tub for a time. Then we'll have a brandy and prepare for this evening. I want to investigate Amador, or F. Orlando as he calls himself. I want to investigate the premises of this bath house."

"Why not wait until then for your bath? It'd make a good dodge for getting in."

"We must gain access by stealth and cleverness. Occult detectives don't go in for disguises and ruses."

"Sorry," I said as he left. I sat in one of the rockers and leaned back. The rain slid down the shutters and far away thunder rolled.

I TURNED up the collar of my cloak and waited for the next lightning flash. Plumrose and I and Barry Todhunter were ducked down in the shrubbery that fenced the slanting empty lot next to F. Orlando's public bath house.

The lightning came and we all looked hard. The house was a rambling sprawling building, all paneled windows and mushroom cupolas. It had three separate weather vanes on its spires and each one seemed to be spinning at a different speed in the wet sea wind.

"Somebody hitching up a buggy out back," said Todhunter.

"What's that behind the stable?" I asked. "Looked like chicken coops."

"So they did," said Plumrose. "It also seems as though Mr. Orlando is going out tonight."

"Do we follow him?"

"I want to take a look around here first," said Plumrose.

"I'm beginning to wonder," said Todhunter, "meaning your splendid display of occult ratio-

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cination no undue slight, Mr. Plumrose, if this isn't all a waste of time. Granted this F. Orlando, or Amador as you prefer to call him, may be the fellow who sent Elizabeth the letters. I find it difficult to credit the idea that he is several hundred years old."

Plumrose was about to answer when the lightning went on again. We all squinted through the high hedge.

"Driver's bringing the buggy around front," I said.

"I hope he gets going. I'm anxious to get inside there."

"Besides," said Todhunter, "Elizabeth's going to remain at home this evening now that our dinner plans have been cancelled. She'll be safe and surrounded by her parents and sisters. There won't even be any visitors, save Elizabeth's piano teacher who will drop in briefly for his usual Friday evening session of instruction."

"Willsey," said Plumrose, "if this young man speaks up again return his fifteen dollars and kick him in the slats."

A short dark figure, thickly caped, appeared on the gingerbread railed porch of the Orlando-Amador place. The figure was half way to the waiting carriage when there was another flash of lightning.

"There's a coincidence for you," said Todhunter as the dark man stepped into the carriage. "This F. Orlando has the same piano teacher as Elizabeth."

The grey cloaked driver snapped the reins and the two white horses drew the carriage off into the rain filled darkness.

I got up and grabbed Todhunter to his feet. "You schlep. That was him."

"I don't quite understand your turn of phrase."

"He means," said Plumrose, "that it is quite possible that Fernand Amador is not only F. Orlando but your Miss Walton's piano instructor to boot."

"Kindly Lorenzo Fern? A centuries old love thief?"

"Take the buggy," said Plumrose. "I'll scout about here. You get over to Miss Walton's."

I pulled Todhunter downhill and around the corner to the place where we'd hitched our horses and rig. "Come on," I said, boosting him up into the driver's seat. "You've got to drive this thing."

"One moment," he said, "Are you certain we won't be making a bad impression if we call on the Waltons this evening?"

"It's considered good taste to save young girls from ancestral curses," I said, jumping up beside him. "Now get us going."

"Yes, sir," he said.

YOU really don't get to know a city until you've raced across it at night during a thunder

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storm sitting behind two damp grey horses.

The Walton home was neat and bright, sitting back behind a smooth lawn that was free of elks or Cupids. Amador's carriage was in front, his driver dozing.

We left our rig down the street and moved up to the house on foot

"Where's she have the piano lessons?" I asked Todhunter.

"Why, in the music room, of course."

"Where's that?"

"On the side of the house there," said Todhunter, pointing at a lighted bow window. "After we are announced we can ask to be allowed in there."

"Come on," I said, clearing the low brick wall around the Walton grounds. "We don't want to announce ourselves to this guy."

"Are you certain this is the correct course of action?"

"It's in all the occult detective manuals."

"Very well." He joined me on the wet lawn.

We zigzagged up toward the house and finally got right under the music room windows. The piano music that I'd noticed when we first hit the lawn had stopped now. I caught a carved sill and pulled myself up.

Behind me Todhunter said, "I can't believe this is proper."

Inside a heavy set dark man who seemed to be in his middle thirties was on his knees next to the piano bench. Seated on the bench, looking surprised, was a slender auburn haired girl. I could understand why Amador had kept at it all these years and why Todhunter wanted to make a good impression. Elizabeth Walton was a fine looking girl.

She shook her head negatively at Amador. He stood up, wringing his hands. Then he slipped one hand inside his coat. A filigreed pistol appeared.

"A rock quick," I yelled to Todhunter, holding out one hand.

He took one from a shrub border and tossed it to me. I strained and swung myself up and smashed the window with the stone.

Elizabeth screamed. Amador whirled and ran to the window.

"This is a private conversation," he said. "Go on about your business or I shall use this weapon on you."

"That would spoil your pattern wouldn't it, Amador?" I said, trying to look threatening while hanging from the window sill.

Elizabeth's family had heard the noise and were banging on the locked music room door.

"You seem to know too much," said Amador.

Todhunter meanwhile had got

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a rock for himself and busted another window. He was climbing into the music room and I was hoping he'd be able to grab Amador from behind before he used his pistol on me or Elizabeth.

"These are most unsatisfactory teaching conditions," he said, spotting Todhunter half into the room.

"Barry," said Elizabeth, "Professor Fern is the one who sent those awful letters."

"I know, dear."

Amador was hesitating, unsure who to shoot first. Then he stepped back and stood up straight. "Oh, my," he said. "Close those windows, you young crackerjacks." His voice was taking on a quaver. "Let me warm my bones." His hair was going white and his face wrinkling. "Never mind the window, bring me my shawl." The aging accelerated and he started to cackle and rattle.

In under five minutes he was gone completely. A pile of well-tailored clothes on the flowered rug.

I let myself down into the room as Todhunter tried to revive the unconscious Elizabeth, who had fainted when Amador hit 100.

Somewhere during all this Amador's carriage driver had taken off. I crossed the room to try and let the rest of the Waltons in.

MR. WALTON was a big black bearded man in his late fifties. The women of the family had taken Elizabeth off somewhere to cheer her up and Todhunter, now completely acceptable to all the Waltons, and I were sitting in the living room trying to explain the real cause of the family curse to Elizabeth's father.

"You feel then that we will have no more trouble?"

"You can't," I said. "Fernand Amador, or Lornzo Fern to you, is gone."

"May I ask how you worked that?" said Todhunter.

"I didn't," I admitted. "He just started aging suddenly."

"It happened at a fortunate time," said Todhunter. "Well, I certainly thank you and Mr. Plumrose for solving all our problems."

"Plumrose," I said, rising up. "We left him out by the ocean."

One of the Waltons' butlers entered. "A Mr. Plumrose to see you, Mr. Walton."

Walton blinked. "Could this be your Mr. Plumrose, Barry?"

"I imagine so."

"Show him in."

It was our Plumrose. "Willsey, Todhunter," he said, grinning. "Edwin Plumrose, Mr. Walton." He extended his hand to the broker.

"How'd you get here?" I asked him.

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"Amador's driver came back to pack prior to making his getaway. I jumped him and commandeered the carriage."

"I understand," said Walton, offering Plumrose a chair, "that I am in debt to you, too, Mr. Plumrose, for lifting the curse of the Waltons."

"There never was a curse," said Plumrose, settling down. "It was all old Fernand Amador acting up."

"You're not asking about him," I said. "Do you know what happened?"

"Why do you think it happened," said Plumrose. "I located his philosopher's stone and smashed it. Even an apprentice occultist will tell you that that breaks the spell for good. I knew he'd age once the stone was no more. When you turn 200 all at once there is not going to be much left."

I agreed. "Where'd you find the stone?"

"Inside the place I noticed, while examining Amador's den, a few feathers. The standard philosopher's stone is, as you must know, rather egg shaped. Amador had hidden it in one of his chicken's nests. I found it. I also gathered a dozen fresh eggs, which I left out in the carriage."

"May I offer you a glass of brandy?" asked Walton.

I walked over close to the seated Plumrose and said in a low voice, "Now that this is solved how about my time ray?"

"In the attic," said Plumrose. "In the attic somewhere is the very piece of equipment that will fix the machine for sure. We'll have you back home within a day."

At the time I actually believed him.

THE END

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On one side were the things of knowledge . . .
on the other, the things of dream. There was no
choice for one who had already
in his heart, signed . . .

A CONTRACT IN KARASTHAN

By PHYLLIS MacLENNAN

I WAS born with a caul, and we born thus enshrouded have the power of second sight, they say. Is that what it was that ailed me all my life, that made the world I dwelt in seem not to be the real one, but a prison? Inside my head I saw another land, enchanted, and knew it well. Its sights, its sounds, its fragrances were truer and more clear to me than those my grosser senses knew around me, and from my earliest boyhood I had waited for the moment when I could start my pilgrimage to that far place.

Have others dreamt the same, and been less fortunate than I? Life sets its snares for us, and we walk into them unknowing, not drawing back in time, until the noose has tightened about us. Then, though we struggle like netted birds, the time is past, the dream too far behind. "I will do this," I said, "and then start out." Thus the first trap is sprung, and it might have been for me as it has been for others, had not an agent of my dream reached out and saved me.

I met a girl. In a loud and crowded gathering she made an oasis of stillness, and summoned me with eyes deep and clear, yet veiled with the third eyelid of some secret knowledge. I had seen her dancing as I slept.

"I am Ysabel," she said. "Why are you here?"

"It is only for a little while," I stammered. "I will come soon."

"Be careful. The contract waits, and only one is offered. Will you be there?"

"I will."

"Then I shall look for you in

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Karasthan." She went away and left no trace behind.

THE world I lived in had set its roots like fungus in my flesh. Tearing them out was painful, but I did it and began my search. No map, no atlas named the place I sought. Villages in Fiji, forgotten cities in Tibet, all these were listed; but never Karasthan. It would be far, I realized, for magic countries must be, and the voice I heard within me was all my guide to find it.

To follow a dream is hard. Hunger and pain and toil make it seem faint and dull its beauty, but how else can it be? This, too, is called for in the contract. I worked my way across the waters, polishing bright-work in the burning sun, sweating in engine-rooms of cranky ships that carried more than their share of vermin. I climbed over mountains, chilled by bitter winds, begging my way when need was —how generous the poor are!— and walked sometimes so long it seemed to me that I stood still and turned the earth beneath me, a treadmill for a fool. At last I found a clue, a sign to tell me that my goal was near.

It was in my mind to go to Madagascar. I had worked my way through the Gulf of Aden, and then, finding no ship, set out on foot along that hostile coast. Yes, even here, where the parched land scorches beside the unheeding sea, one may find villages, and bazaars, and simple folk who show respect to madmen. In such a place there was a story-teller, an old man, with the look of one who knew. He held the people spell-bound with accounts of wizards and unheard-of things. When he had finished, I went to him and offered him a coin.

"This, for a tale of Karasthan," I said. He took it and walked on. I followed him, to a tiled courtyard where a miser fountain trickled its sparse treasure into a dusty basin. There he sat down and I beside him, waiting, to hear the words that silver bought for me.

"There is a story that sailors tell of an island that floats in the sea. Hiding itself in a cloud, it drifts and sends out the dreams that ensnare the souls of those it has marked for its own. There be sorcerers, crouched like spiders, watching the web they have woven over the world, feeling the threads go taut at the touch of their victims, drawing them in with enchantments so mighty few men can resist them. Whatever one craves of delight is imagined to be there, and he who is caught by them goes of his own will to that island. The cloud parts for him and all is fair to his eyes, for they love

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beauty and they have much skill in building palaces, of marble and fine stones all cut like lace. And they have gardens there like none upon this earth, of flowers they have stolen from Paradise, with such perfumes men drown in ecstasy. There too are maidens marvelously beautiful, but it is said that they are puppets, moving at their masters' whim, who may be broken but who cannot die, for they have never lived. And other treasures have they, such as spendthrifts dream of. There rare and costly things are heaped unguarded, so common to these wizards they scarce look at them. Yet none can steal them, for none can leave that island through its encircling cloud unless its lords permit.

"When the one who comes has seen all this, and thinks to profit from it, his soul is fat and sweet. Then do they seize him and by their black arts suck out his essence, for it is their meat, and what is left of him becomes a beast and they do chain it with others of its kind in holes beneath the earth.

"As I have told thee, thus is Karasthan."

I SEARCHED his eyes and knew he lied. There was no pity in him, only envy. Had he, too, dreamed the dream? Had it abandoned him? No matter. He had told me where to search.

That night I stole a boat and put to sea. Three days and nights I followed wind and currents, leaving the land behind, neither afraid nor joyful, only certain my goal was close at hand. On the fourth day the wind died, and I seemed to float adrift in time. The water I had brought to drink was gone. I had not eaten and my head was light. I lay down in the bottom and, staring into the empty sky above me, I made my mind a blank so no awareness of heat or thirst could reach me. I cannot tell how long I lay thus. A coolness on my skin told me that there were mists about me, a strange phenomenon upon those brassy waters. I raised up on one arm and looked into a sea of whiteness. Fog thick enough to drink had swallowed me. Only a tiny circle of black, oily water lapped at the boat and seemed to urge it forward.

For the first time, I trembled. This was no dream. I could not pinch myself and spring awake in some bright noisy city where the hazards were such as I could cope with. What stubborn folly, what deluded flight from the real world I lived in had brought me here? Death crouched in the bows and stared at me.

"Go back, or go on," a message came to me. "Choose, for the time is now."

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They did not coax me. They sent no visions, made no promises. My head was clear from fasting. Mist on my skin had eased my thirst. Accounts and balances: what was I to weigh? The things I knew against the things I dreamed of. On one side, a heap of baubles like cardboard blocks for children: garish without, empty within; to be stacked and counted, traded and measured—trifles to judge a life by. Against these, a spider thread of hope. What had I really sought, beyond the beauty? Others who saw with eyes like mine, those who had met the contract, and who knew something beyond my knowing at this moment. There was no choice. Without that hope I died, no matter what befell my body.

Sighing, a zephyr breeze puffed out the sails and guided me to Karasthan.

My boat slid through the fog, and glided forth onto a turquoise sea. Before me lay an island like none upon this earth, and yet, I knew it well. My soul had walked here often in my dreams. This was my home. The air caressed me, warm, fragrant with spice and roses, and I stepped out onto a crescent beach of rosy sand as soft as velvet. I took the path that led up to the city. The plaza in its center was just as I expected: trees arching overhead, the gentle light that filtered through their leaves all green and gold; benches and tables scattered, and people seated there who seemed to know me and who smiled in greeting as I passed. Here were the beasts the story-teller spoke of, but not chained. I recognized them; I would be one of them. Such is the contract. They wandered free, but came if they were wanted, for they are servants.

I sat down at a table laid for me with bread and fruit and wine. I ate, and then awaited Ysabel. She made her entrance riding upon an elephant. He knelt, she slid down from his neck, and came to me.

"I was on the mountain when you landed. . . . Your contract starts tomorrow."

"Mine ends when yours begins," the elephant's thought spoke in my head.

"Must I be an elephant?"

"What will you choose?"

"A cat?" I ventured.

Ysabel gestured. On the table before us a leopard posed, all black and sleek like carven ebony. He gazed at me with citron-colored eyes, then poured himself upon the ground. Slouching away, he turned to smoke and vanished.

"Proud, treacherous, and cruel," judged Ysabel. "These are no lessons you need learn. Such forms are for the weak."

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"Shall I become a bird, and sing to you?"

"Not to me alone. . . . I like your choice. You are not lovely now, but we will make you into such a bird as none have ever seen, glorious as a peacock, yet with a voice sweeter than nightingales'. You will give much pleasure."

Smiling, she left me. The elephant stayed near, nodding his head and swaying from side to side as to some secret music.

"Yours was a strange shape to wish," I commented.

"Not so strange," he answered in my head. "As a man, I am small. Smallness spoiled my thinking."

None spoke to me aloud, but silent welcomes met me everywhere. When I had rested, I walked about the city, to recognize the landscape of my visions. Here was a garden I had sat in once, here were the very blossoms, and the music of the windbells chiming. Beyond this garden, a pavilion I thought of as my own, for I had shaped it to my heart's desire in many nights of dreaming. When evening came, I found my way to an old cellar, vaulted and walled with stone, and here I dined on meat and saffron rice while dancing girls of ivory and gold performed for their own pleasure more than mine.

The night passed singing.

In the morning I went back to the plaza. Ysabel waited there, the elephant beside her. She handed me a cup of amethyst, deep as the years are long.

"Drink," she commanded; and I drank. . . .

THE END

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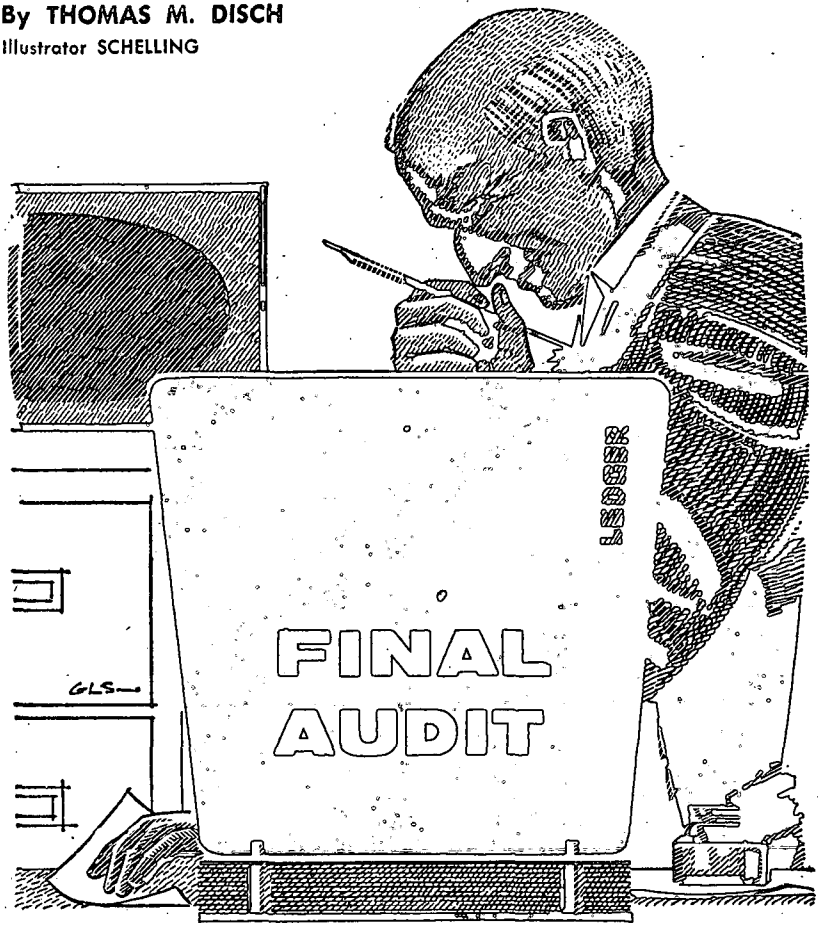
By THOMAS M. DISCH

Illustrator SCHELLING



Fantasy is often more bittersweet for being gentle . . . as is this wistful, solidly realized tale of a time gone by, and of a gentleman who had the gift of prophecy, but could never make it work to his advantage. Until, one day . . .

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THE gas hissed from the gilt brackets and burned with a steady yellow glow. The pendulum of the clock on the wall ticked off the seconds, as was its habit, while, in the larger office without, clerks shuffled papers and their feet, and the characteristic whine of the bank president, Lucius Vole, sounded, now and again, like an oboe playing passages scored for the flute.

Inside the auditing room, the two men heard nothing of this. Their thoughts were far from that cramped, mahogany-panelled office where they spent the ten hours of their work-day from Monday to Saturday, and equally far from the dull present of that particular Tuesday morning in April of 1894. Each, in fact, was thinking of a morning just one month away, a morning immensely more important than this.

Gazing at a tinted photo-portrait in a frame of enamel roses, the younger auditor, Charlie Doyle, looked to that future morning with blissful anticipation. The girl in that picture, her chestnut hair tumbled in happy abundance about a face that would have been the delight of any fashion engraver, was his fiancee, and on the Ninth of May, 1894, at ten o'clock in St. Pancras' chapel, she would become Mrs. Charlie Doyle.

To the senior auditor of the Broadway Bank for Private Savings, as he sat looking intently at a blank page of the ledger-book spread out before him, the prospect of that future day was altogether less pleasant. Gently he pressed his thin, ink-stained fingers to the page and sighed. He closed the book and looked up at Charlie Doyle, still wrapped in his own happier thoughts. He re-opened the book and rifled through the blank pages at the back until he had found what he looked for—though no one but himself could have seen what that was. Then he slammed the book shut angrily, rousing Charlie from his reveries.

"Nothing to do, Mr. Doyle?" He was himself again—a figure of almost Draconian severity. Well may we wonder what secret thoughts and grim, unspoken fears were concealed behind this mask of stern efficiency.

"Sorry, Mr. Briggim."

Charlie smiled vaguely, more to the absent Cecily than to the irascible Mr. Briggim, and placed the picture in his top desk drawer beside a file of rose-scented correspondence unrelated to his offices as an auditor.

The morning's work began in earnest, and, except for the occasional interruptions of their private thoughts, both men pored over the sheets of figures, checking, comparing, doing mental

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sums of the long columns three digits at a time, making small check marks with their red pencils, or, when a page had no errors, approving it with a florid initial, and stopping only briefly to ask a question or consult one of the leather-bound books in the shelves along the walls.

Twice the younger man abstracted from the breast pocket of his coat a morocco case from which he selected a dark-brown cigar of a size imposing even for that more hardy age. On these occasions, Mr. Briggim would look up from his figures, press his thin lips tightly together (for he could not approve infractions of the bank's rules, even in the sanctuary of the auditors' own office), sniff reproachfully at the thick blue clouds that passed across his desk, and return to his figures without actually reprimanding his assistant (because, after all, though not subject to that vice himself, he liked the smell).

AT twelve o'clock, half of the work-day being spent, each man removed from his desk a brown paper bag, Charlie's being far the larger. Usually they ate in silence, while the figures went on buzzing through their minds, like flies caught in a trap. Today, however, Charlie had something to say.

"Well, Mr. Briggim," he began, swiping at the angry flies, "the biggest thing happened Sunday since the Chicago fire."

Briggim looked up from his buttered roll anxiously. Charlie laughed.

"But it's good news." Charlie handed Briggim the photo-portrait of his fiancee. "That pretty little girl, Miss Cecily Hines by name, plighted her troth Sunday morning."

"She did indeed . . . remarkable." The flies, though today for Mr. Briggim they were not the usual ones, still buzzed angrily.

"Sunday morning. And one month from today is the big event."

Briggim stared at his assistant aghast, as though he had caught him falsifying an entry in the annual report.

"What do you mean, sir, by *one month from today*?"

"Why the marriage, Mr. Briggim! Cecily and I are getting married. Just one month from today on the Ninth of May at ten o'clock in St. Pancras' Chapel."

"Oh," said Briggim, discovering the false entry had been his own. "In that case, congratulations. Yes, I surely must wish you the very best. She is . . . a very lovely girl."

Briggim returned the picture and looked at his roll with sudden distaste. A light eater by long habit, Briggim was unused

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to indigestion. He forced himself to eat and tried to listen to Charlie's account of the biggest thing since the Chicago fire, but he heard something else that utterly drowned out Charlie's voice.

"Listen: do you hear that, Doyle? The way those lamps sputter. These new-fangled gas lights aren't safe. They could explode any minute."

Charlie looked at his superior, then at the steady flame of gas, then back to Briggim, having decided that the chief difficulty was localized there.

"All gas lamps make a noise like that, Mr. Briggim. It's nothing to worry about."

"I don't trust them."

They sat together uneasily, listening to the hiss and sputter of the flame.

"Twelve-fifteen, Mr. Briggim. Back to work."

While the men added figures in columns of three, the flies swarmed out of the trap. The pendulum went on with its simple addition of one and one and one. The gas jets continued their steady expiratiration with, now and then, a polite cough to remind Mr. Briggim of their presence. Lucius Vole, the President of the Broadway Bank for Private Savings, visited the auditors' office at three o'clock, shuffled their papers with a great show of efficiency and to no apparent purpose, gave them detailed instructions on a job they had finished that morning, and concluded the afternoon's sonata for oboe and flute with a rhapsody on the dangers of anarchist labor unions and of the mutualization of banks to the American system of free enterprise. It was the most ordinary of afternoons.

FIVE o'clock came, and Charlie Doyle went to the home of his fiancee, but Mr. Briggim remained at the office. Once alone, he again brought out the ledger-book which possessed such a mysterious fascination for him. It was a record of the bank's postal expenditures and would not seem to possess a special significance either for Mr. Briggim personally or for the bank corporately. In fact, the accounting procedures of the bank had long since subsumed postal expenditures under the heading of "Office Expenses" so there was no reason for Mr. Briggim to continue to make entries in the book. Yet it was the first thing he did in the morning and the consideration he gave to this task would not have been excessive had he been formulating some entirely novel principle in the field of physics or of chemistry.

Mr. Briggim, however, knew nothing and cared less of the theory of electricity or the formation of benzine-rings. Even theoretical accountancy was no

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concern of his. Mr. Briggim was a seer.

To be exact, Mr. Briggim could see the entries on the page of the ledger one month before they were entered. Each day a new, prophetic entry appeared and yesterday's vanished. It was a gift unique to himself, for anyone else examining the page saw only empty, white space cross-hatched with light blue lines and red column markings. Mr. Briggim's prophecies were invariably correct; he had checked them entry by entry every working day for the last thirty years. Mr. Briggim was a seer, and this extraordinary talent was of no mortal good to him whatever.

A record of postal expenditure is not the material that oracles have traditionally dealt in. One could not read into such figures the fate of empires or even of the stock market. The mailing clerks at the bank—even they—would not have been especially interested in these figures. Had they been, they could have found them out for themselves without prophetic aid, for the figures did not represent a future occurrence: the ghostly entries were a record of *postal expenditures for that very day.*

It is an auditor's duty to see that the bank's records, day-by-day and quarter-by-quarter, are accurate in every particular. To accomplish this, auditors' records are systematically behind the times. The figures that Mr. Briggim dealt with every day were, therefore, those of the previous month; his prophetic vision extended no further into the future than his own nose, which, though more than usually long, was quite contemporary.

MR. Briggim had first encountered his peculiar, if profitless, ability at the age of twenty-five, when then himself the junior auditor in the Broadway Bank for Private Savings, situated at that time in less munificent quarters further down that eminent thoroughfare. Abraham Vole, the founder and first president of the bank, had made not inconsiderable profits in textiles during the first years of the recent national contest, and had decided before its conclusion, doubtless prudently, to retire with his spoils into the quieter arena of Finance. The youthful Mr. Briggim had had the good fortune to be appointed junior auditor at the bank's founding, having received an education in the principles of accounting and also partly in consideration of certain services rendered by his late father, a major-general in the Purchasing Office of the Union Army, to Mr. Vole. Mr. Briggim's prospects had been bright.

But to return to the crucial moment of discovery—

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Mr. Briggim was in the long low-ceilinged room above the bank floor, common to all the clerks, accountants, and correspondents in Mr. Vole's employ. He was examining the ledger of postal expenditures into which Lucius Vole, the president's son, then a youth of sixteen newly-apprenticed to the art of finance, had entered the figures for the Twelfth of September. Young Lucius wrote in a loose, undisciplined hand that discomfited even the youthful and tolerant Mr. Briggim, but the figures had, at least, been entered into the proper column and their sum taken accurately. Briggim initialled the page.

In closing the ledger, he let the right-hand sheaf of fresh pages fall forward and glimpsed in the usually virgin whiteness, a page of figures. These figures were on the page headed October 12, that very day. Of course, they had no right being there; that particular page would not be used for another month. Mr. Briggim was on the point of summoning Lucius when he observed that these figures were *in his own hand.* No one in that office, he was convinced, could have imitated his handwriting so exactly: the serif on the "O" of October, the subtle curve of the "2", the exactitude of the "8," the complex tracery of his initial at the bottom of the page. He must have written those figures himself—and he knew that he had not.

Doubting his own senses, Briggim made no mention of the entries. Lucius was relieved of the postal expenditures ledger and assigned to another task more in keeping with his prospects. The next day and the next, Briggim followed the progress of the unaccountable entries from page to page in the ledger. Only slowly did he come to suspect the real significance of what he was witnessing. After two months of scrupulous comparisons between the two sets of figures, real and prophetic, two months during which he vacillated between states of morbid doubt and equally morbid fantasy, he had at last assured himself that his precognitive faculties were as accurate and as unerring as his arithmetic.

Briggim did not at first appreciate the limits set to these powers. Circumstances encouraged his misunderstanding. He proposed to a young lady whose favored station in life had seemed hitherto to prohibit his ambitions. Now he *knew* that his proposal would be accepted; it was. He entered into the sporting life through the offices of young Lucius, and, by sheer bravado, gained some astonishing victories at the gaming tables and the tracks. Only slowly did

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he realize that success was not invariable, and as his confidence ebbed, bad luck overwhelmed him.

He returned to the ledger-book, chastened and resentful. The date of his wedding had been postponed for financial reasons; young Lucius was now his equal in the bank. He had powers beyond all imagining, and his position had altered not at all.

He set out upon a program of communications with the future, using the ledger-book itself. At first, his experiences were disheartening. Day after day, he found nothing in the ledger-book, but the same insignificant records of stamps purchased, stamps used, and foreign mailing costs. A month later he began to enter small notations in the ledger on unexpected upsets at the tracks or sudden changes in stocks or commodities: notes that he had never seen. The ledger, which was his sole access to the future, refused to let him glimpse anything but *just those figures which properly belonged there.*

Having ascertained this further limit upon his prescience, Briggim devised a code with which to relay crucial points of information, using nothing but the figures on postal expenditures. Thus, if a pre-selected stock had been steadily rising in the market for the last week, Mr. Briggim would slant the 8's on the ledger page that day. A month before he would have observed this difference and known its meaning.

Briggim began cautiously to invest by this method and regained a certain degree of affluence. He did not tell his fiancee however, for he had promised her that his gaming was at an end, and she would not have made nice distinctions between the games of Wall Street and of the backroom.

It was at this tide that the elder Vole offered Briggim the position of head teller on the banking floor, a gesture perhaps not unrelated to certain sensational stories being presented in the metropolitan press, but a kind gesture nonetheless. The president was pleased to accept the junior auditor's inarticulate refusal and appointed his son Lucius in Briggim's stead. From that moment, relations between the son of the bank president and the son of the late major-general were distinctly cooler.

DISSATISFIED with the rate of capital appreciation which his investments were realizing, Briggim adapted his code to the race track. For each important race, Briggim found the horse with the worst odds, and on a pre-determined day after the race, he indicated in the ledger

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whether that horse had won or lost, by a slight alteration in the way he initialled the page. Usually, of course, the horse lost, but at last Briggim found himself a winner. The horse, *John Brown,* that was to win the next week was running at 100 to 1 against the popular favorite, *Snowman.*

Briggim sold his securities and brought the cash—over $300—to a bookie to whom Lucius Vole had introduced him in their sporting days. The bookie tried to convince him to place his bet on *Snowman,* but Briggim would not listen to him. In the days before the race his thoughts dwelt exclusively upon the multiples of $30,000, his anticipated winnings.

John Brown won the race, but Briggim lost every cent. The bookie claimed, when Briggim appeared to collect his winnings, never to have seen him before, told him that he was a fool to put money on a 100 to 1 shot, and suggested that, as he valued his health, he abstain from any future gambling. Briggim valued his health and departed from the craven, bereft even of his original investment. Such an episode may seem incredible to the modern reader unless he remembers that the ethical code of that bloody and ruthless era favored the predator at the expense of men of simple faith.

Lucius Vole learned of Briggim's misfortune quickly, although he understood that Briggim had laid his $300 on the loser, *Snowman;* it hardly seemed worthwhile to disabuse him of this notion. The elder Vole, too, heard this story and warned Briggim that his wild conduct compromised the bank's reputation, not to speak of Briggim's own. Worst of all, his fiancee discovered what had happened and broke off their engagement only a week before the day of the wedding. Briggim, utterly reduced, lacked even the courage to return the wedding present that his maiden aunt had sent from Philadelphia. When the day came for Briggim to indicate in the ledger that *John Brown* had won over *Snowman,* he did so with the most scrupulous Calvinism.

BRIGGIM was now a man with a single idea: to wrest some advantage from his extraordinary talent. He had been five years a junior auditor, and his bright prospects were now somewhat tarnished. He had forever lost the love of the one woman who had inspired him with passion. He had lost, besides the vigor of his youth and its attendant pleasures. The several aspects of his once lively intellect were reduced to a single, relentless preoccupation.

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Briggim returned to the stock market and gradually, by anticipating its movements, he was again prospering. The only disadvantage of his method was that it could show the condition of only two or three stocks at a time, and these stocks had to be selected a month in advance. By a singular misfortune, Briggim, in September of 1873, was investigating the ambiguous movements of a group of Western mining stocks, when the Crash occurred. His whole investment fund was, at that time, placed in safekeeping with Jay Cooke and Company, a financial house with a reputation for dependability equal to that of the Roman Church. Naturally, being limited in his researches into the future, Briggim did not bother to investigate the daily condition of Jay Cooke. He might as well have wondered if the sun were still in the sky. What man of mature years now alive can forget the horror, the sheer amazement, that gripped the nation when the bankruptcy of Cooke and Co. was announced? No one had anticipated it—not even Mr. Briggim. He found little consolation in being attended in his ruin by the entire economy.

Briggim never speculated again, but he was unable to free himself from his mania. Prophecy was no longer his talent; it was his vice. The gift that had betrayed him on so many occasions had finally reduced him to a condition of utter baseness. His sole interest in life and all his pride was "forecasting" the bank's postal expenses on the day that they were incurred. Twice more he refused advancement in the bank in order to remain by his treacherous ledger-book. Then, shortly before resigning from this mortal life, Abraham Vole appointed Mr. Briggim to the position of senior auditor. To this, Briggim had no objection.

He was forty-five years old at that time. He had forgotten most of his own past. He did not remember that he had once been on familiar terms with the new bank president, Lucius Vole, and he did not know that, several years back, Lucius had been joined in wedlock with his own ex-fiancee. The single incendiary ray had produced a brief, bright conflagration and left behind a few dead embers where once had been a man.

THE year 1894 found Mr. Briggim changed only in certain small ways: the subtraction of several teeth and addition of a dental plate; the multiplication of wrinkles about his eyes; and the division of his grey hair into two modest fringes above either ear, which joined at the

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sums of the long columns three digits at a time, making small check marks with their red pencils, or, when a page had no errors, approving it with a florid initial, and stopping only briefly to ask a question or consult one of the leather-bound books in the shelves along the walls.

Twice the younger man abstracted from the breast pocket of his coat a morocco case from which he selected a dark-brown cigar of a size imposing even for that more hardy age. On these occasions, Mr. Briggim would look up from his figures, press his thin lips tightly together (for he could not approve infractions of the bank's rules, even in the sanctuary of the auditors' own office), sniff reproachfully at the thick blue clouds that passed across his desk, and return to his figures without actually reprimanding his assistant (because, after all, though not subject to that vice himself, he liked the smell).

AT twelve o'clock, half of the work-day being spent, each man removed from his desk a brown paper bag, Charlie's being far the larger. Usually they ate in silence, while the figures went on buzzing through their minds, like flies caught in a trap. Today, however, Charlie had something to say.

"Well, Mr. Briggim," he began, swiping at the angry flies, "the biggest thing happened Sunday since the Chicago fire."

Briggim looked up from his buttered roll anxiously. Charlie laughed.

"But it's good news." Charlie handed Briggim the photo-portrait of his fiancee. "That pretty little girl, Miss Cecily Hines by name, plighted her troth Sunday morning."

"She did indeed . . . remarkable." The flies, though today for Mr. Briggim they were not the usual ones, still buzzed angrily.

"Sunday morning. And one month from today is the big event."

Briggim stared at his assistant aghast, as though he had caught him falsifying an entry in the annual report.

"What do you mean, sir, by *one month from today*?"

"Why the marriage, Mr. Briggim! Cecily and I are getting married. Just one month from today on the Ninth of May at ten o'clock in St. Pancras' Chapel."

"Oh," said Briggim, discovering the false entry had been his own. "In that case, congratulations. Yes, I surely must wish you the very best. She is . . . a very lovely girl."

Briggim returned the picture and looked at his roll with sudden distaste. A light eater by long habit, Briggim was unused

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THE gas hissed from the gilt brackets and burned with a steady yellow glow. The pendulum of the clock on the wall ticked off the seconds, as was its habit, while, in the larger office without, clerks shuffled papers and their feet, and the characteristic whine of the bank president, Lucius Vole, sounded, now and again, like an oboe playing passages scored for the flute.

Inside the auditing room, the two men heard nothing of this. Their thoughts were far from that cramped, mahogany-panelled office where they spent the ten hours of their work-day from Monday to Saturday, and equally far from the dull present of that particular Tuesday morning in April of 1894. Each, in fact, was thinking of a morning just one month away, a morning immensely more important than this.

Gazing at a tinted photo-portrait in a frame of enamel roses, the younger auditor, Charlie Doyle, looked to that future morning with blissful anticipation. The girl in that picture, her chestnut hair tumbled in happy abundance about a face that would have been the delight of any fashion engraver, was his fiancee, and on the Ninth of May, 1894, at ten o'clock in St. Pancras' chapel, she would become Mrs. Charlie Doyle.

To the senior auditor of the Broadway Bank for Private Savings, as he sat looking intently at a blank page of the ledger-book spread out before him, the prospect of that future day was altogether less pleasant. Gently he pressed his thin, ink-stained fingers to the page and sighed. He closed the book and looked up at Charlie Doyle, still wrapped in his own happier thoughts. He re-opened the book and rifled through the blank pages at the back until he had found what he looked for—though no one but himself could have seen what that was. Then he slammed the book shut angrily, rousing Charlie from his reveries.

"Nothing to do, Mr. Doyle?" He was himself again—a figure of almost Draconian severity. Well may we wonder what secret thoughts and grim, unspoken fears were concealed behind this mask of stern efficiency.

"Sorry, Mr. Briggim."

Charlie smiled vaguely, more to the absent Cecily than to the irascible Mr. Briggim, and placed the picture in his top desk drawer beside a file of rose-scented correspondence unrelated to his offices as an auditor.

The morning's work began in earnest, and, except for the occasional interruptions of their private thoughts, both men pored over the sheets of figures, checking, comparing, doing mental

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distraction. When, at lunch, Charlie Doyle noted that there were only *twenty-nine days left,* Briggim experienced a spasm of indigestion which necessitated his temporary absence from their chambers.

CHARLIE did not have the opportunity on April 30 to announce to Briggim that only nine days remained, because, on the previous day his superior had been taken home at noon in a hack, prostrated by weakness and flushed with a fever of 101°.

On the Eighth of May, Lucius Vole stepped into the auditors' office to see if Briggim had recovered. He had not.

"If he isn't here tomorrow, Mr. Doyle, you will be a very lucky man. These are hard times. I can't keep invalids on the payroll forever. Tomorrow, if I don't see Briggim, you will be the senior auditor in this bank. My son will be out of school in a week or so; he can assist you."

Charlie did not have to invent a reply. The bank president had gone on to discuss the perils of anarchism, as evidenced especially in the organization of unions by upstart laborers who didn't know which side their bread was buttered on. Apparently, there was no answer to this problem but the "eradication of every last man-jack of them."

That evening, on the eve of Charlie's wedding, Mr. Briggim dined on two lamb chops and a steaming bowl of lentils prepared and brought to his room by his landlady, a figure locally prominent for her militant temperance, and very particular about her lodgers. Mr. Briggim had rented his quarters from her since his father's decease. The woman stayed to attend to her lodger's needs and complimented him on his recovery. It had been a remarkable convalescence for a man of his age. Why, there he was, sitting in an easy chair, his belly full of good, hot food, dressed as spiff and trim as anything, and reading the *Times.* She hadn't seen him looking so spry for years. He would be going back to work soon, wouldn't he? Yes, in a day or two. Hard times, Mr. Briggim, these were hard times. So many people out of work. Where did they all come from? Mr. Briggim wouldn't have to worry about his job at the bank though. He'd worked there how many years. Thirty years! And never a day sick. Would he, Would he what, Have to worry? Of course not.

The door bell sounded downstairs and his landlaly left to see who it was, she couldn't imagine. She returned with Charlie Doyle and the young lady in the portrait.

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nape of his neck, a meeting directly veiled by a high, starched collar.

The same year found the nation rather more affected. After two decades of mature avarice, the disease had been brought to a new crisis. The economy wasted with fever, like a wealthy miser wracked by hunger pangs. Beggars rioted and bankers roared, and men like Briggim and Charlie Doyle saw their salaries cut in half and then in quarters and lived much as they had before.

Then came the morning of April 9th. It poked at the dead embers and sifted them and fanned them with a bellows and behold—there was yet one small, live coal. For Briggims had seen that in the ledger which had awakened his every sleeping fiber, trembling and stifling a cry, as one who wakes from fearful dreams. Briggim had seen Death.

Briggim had found no entries for the audit of the Ninth of May. The terrors of an addict suddenly deprived of his opium would not have equaled those that Briggim felt that morn. It was not simply that the entries had disappeared or, rather, failed to appear; the smooth, milky whiteness of the page had been crisped and cracked and blackened and reduced to a thin shell of carbon. Briggim looked from the ordinary blankness of the page before to the charred and shriveled prophecy facing it. He pressed his finger to the page and felt its smoothness, but still he was the augury.

It bore but one interpretation: that, sometime on the Ninth of May, the ledger-book had been consumed in flames. A fire fierce enough to devour the leather binding and totally destroy the page at the center of the book—such a fire would have been impossible to assuage—*would be* impossible to assuage. Sometime on the Ninth of May, the Broadway Bank for Private Savings would be destroyed by fire—and, Briggim thought with helpless rage, himself.

The next day, arriving early at the bank, Briggim examined the ledger page for the Tenth of May. As he had feared, the impending holocaust had cast its black shadow across that page too. He felt some inner muscle tighten and relax, and the blackness of the page spread across his field of vision, like the gigantic wings of some Apocalyptic bird palling the sun and stars and moonless sky in eclipse.

Charlie Doyle found Briggim unconscious over the open ledger and revived him with a vigorous facial massage. The morning's work began, but the roar of gas from the lamps and the ominous play of light across the bookshelves and wooden panels of the room was a constant source of

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"Callers for you, Mr. Briggim. You'll excuse me, I have some things downstairs to attend to."

Briggim paled, forgetting even to rise while Charlie introduced Cecily.

"You know," Charlie said, introductions concluded, "that tomorrow is our wedding."

"Yes, I couldn't forget that."

There was an awkward lapse into silence, while Charlie looked about the sparsely-furnished, businesslike quarters of the senior auditor. Cecily rescued the conversation.

"Dear Mr. Briggim, we would so like for you to come to the wedding. There won't be many there, as Charlie has no relatives on this side. If you were well enough, we thought . . ." She broke off, blushing at her impetuosity.

"We thought, Mr. Briggim, that you might be my best man."

Briggim was too taken aback to reply. Cecily glanced meaningfully at her fiancee.

"There's this too, sir. Mr. Vole, you know how he's all upset about the anarchists and business being the way it is. . . ."

"Yes."

"He said if you weren't in tomorrow, he'd make me senior auditor. If you'll only come in and show him your face tomorrow, why then, everything would be all right."

"Please, Mr. Briggim," Cecily said with surprising firmness. "I'd be so ashamed of Charlie being promoted that way. I could not bear it. That awful Mr. Vole!" This, with a stamp of her foot and a deeper blush.

Charlie went on. "It would be just for a minute or two and then we must be off to St. Pancras' chapel. Mr. Vole agreed that my best man could come to the wedding, and then we'll have a celebration after."

Briggim found his voice. It had turned very dry and very thin.

"You do me too much honor."

"No, sir. It would be felt as a great favor."

"A *great* favor, Mr. Briggim," Cecily emphasized.

"By all means then. I shall be there in the morning to pay my respects to Lucius Vole, and afterwards . . ." His voice thinned to inaudibility. He coughed. ". . . afterwards I shall be only too pleased to join the wedding party. That is, if I am still in the health that I enjoy tonight."

Charlie and Cecily each thanked him and assured him that he seemed marvellously fit and would be tomorrow, no doubt about it. Briggim escorted them downstairs to the door.

Climbing back up the stairs, Briggim was confronted with the formidible bulk of his landlady. She stared at him balefully.

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"You *will* be in health tomorrow, Mister Briggim. Your rent comes due Friday, you know. These are hard times we live in. Hard times."

Briggim answered not at all. The shadow of giant wings seemed to descend over the staircase and he heard their rustle, like the hiss of a gas lamp.

MR. Briggim was awake and dressed on the morning of the Ninth even before his landlady came to rap on his door. Before breakfasting, Mr. Briggim went to his closet and resurrected from under a pile of yellowed financial journals, the present that his Philadelphia aunt had sent him more than twenty years before. Once dusted, the wrapping seemed cheerful enough in its faded way. Nothing much could be done, however, for the ribbons. Briggim had no idea what the present was, but, as it had been originally intended for such an occasion as today's, he was confident of its seemliness. It was both heavier and larger than he had remembered.

After a cup of tea with his landlady, who appeared this morning in the best of spirits, Mr. Briggim set off for the bank with his wedding present under his arm. He had to rest several times on the way to recover his strength and arrived at the bank the same moment as Mr. Vole.

Mr. Vole twisted his lips approximately into a smile: "The Bank has felt your absence, Mr. Briggim."

"Indeed, Lucius! It is a comfort to the invalid to know that he is remembered."

The President made a squeak at the top of his register; it had been decades since Briggim had addressed him as Lucius.

"I have brought, as you see," Mr. Briggim went on good-humoredly, "a present for the young gentleman."

Mr. Vole had not yet recovered from his shock. He stood, as Briggim had found him, holding open the great bronze door of the bank. Briggim walked in ahead of his employer.

"Thank you, Lucius. Have you already presented Mr. Doyle with *your* gift?"

"No, I . . ."

"Ah, I see! You intend to surprise him. Well don't forget to get it to him before we leave for the chapel. Good morning . . . Lucius."

Charlie Doyle was already in the auditors' office. He greeted his superior with such effusive cheer that one might have supposed Briggim and not himself were shortly to stand at Hymen's altar. Briggim presented Charlie with the large, heavy package in its faded wrapper and bade him unwrap it, for he was quite anxious to discover what his aunt,

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so long deceased, had intended for his ill-fated marriage. Charlie cut the crushed ribbon, tore off the wrappings, broke open the box, and threw out handful after handful of excelsior before he could uncover the first piece. It was the teapot; then came the sugar bowl and tongs; next the matching pitcher and the small lemon dish; last and most resplendently, the great oval tray. Charlie arranged them on his desk: the massy silver vessels, grouped on the richly ornamented tray were only slightly tarnished. They shone in the gaslight, as a rich hoard, discovered in some pirate-cave, would gleam in the torch's smoky light, trembling in the explorer's hand. Etched on each piece of the service, in the most delicate calligraphy, was the single initial, "B."

Charlie stood back from the treasure-hoard and shook his head.

"But, Briggim . . . Mr. Briggim, how . . ."

The benefactor, though almost as amazed as his beneficiary at such magnanimity, was distinctly embarrassed by the "B's" emblazoned everywhere. "Now, Charlie," he at last pronounced with an appearance of nonchalance, "I wanted to get something . . . appropriate. It was, actually, a great bargain; the initials, you see. A family of my acquaintance, in reduced circumstances, had to sell certain heirlooms at a loss."

"But, sir! This!"

"Nothing more, Mr. Doyle. I won't hear another word."

THE bank messenger entered the auditors' office and relieved Briggim of further explanations. The messenger was in a state not unlike that which is said to be induced by mesmerism. He handed Charlie Doyle an envelope.

"This is from Mr. Vole. He said that he wishes you many, long years of 'nubial bliss, his very words." Glassy-eyed and breathing irregularly, the messenger stayed and watched Charlie open the envelope. It contained hundred dollar bills: one, two, three, four . . .

"Mr. Briggim. God have mercy on all sinners! *One-thousand dollars!* From him, from Mr. Vole!"

Both the messenger and Charlie seemed ready to swoon. Briggim, however, was level-headed enough still to realize that a mistake had been made: Lucius Vole could not have intended to give more than ten dollars. In the condition in which Briggim had left him, the president, never especially articulate, must have garbled his orders to the head teller. Such, in fact, had been the case, but it was the good fortune of Charlie Doyle that the mistake was not to be discovered.

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"A very considerate gesture, I must say, but then Lucius *is* known for his generosity. You will have to write a note to our employer expressing your appreciation. But really! it is time to be off."

CHARLIE put the envelope into his breast pocket, thought better of it, and whipped out a money belt from beneath his vest. Then, the money safely stowed, the two men hastily repacked the silver tea service into the box, and set off for St. Pancras' Chapel, only a few blocks away. Briggim, confused by the events of the last hour, was agitated by the thought that Cecily, whom he had somehow confused with a former acquaintance dear to memory, would have left the chapel before they arrived. Arriving at St. Pancras', however, the two men were greeted by a small wedding party, consisting of Cecily's parents, two younger sisters, and a very elderly uncle, who was evidently as confused as Mr. Briggim. The sexton, anxious to see the chapel cleared before the next wedding at eleven o'clock, pulled Charlie and his best man down the aisle to the altar at the highest velocity consonant with the dignity of that occasion.

The wedding seemed to Mr. Briggim to be extremely brief, only long enough to gather the vaguest impressions of a little discordant music and Cecily looking quite beautiful in a veil and tall, white candles, their tiny flames almost invisible in the sunlight that streamed in from the windows above the altar.

Then, in a flash, the wedding party was seated at an overlarge table in a private dining room at a nearby hotel. The silver tea service had been spread out before the company, who were enthusiastic in its praises. The further news of Mr. Vole's generosity dumbfounded even the bride, who confessed that she had misjudged that worthy.

Course followed course in Apician profusion; Bacchus himself poured the wine. The bride was toasted and the groom was toasted, and they were toasted together. Mr. Briggim proposed a toast, in the drollest terms, to Mr. Vole, although the company, supposing him to refer to Lucius, did not appreciate the irony of the epithet, "Honest Abe." The aged uncle of the bride, more confused than ever, proposed a toast to Mr. Briggim, which he concluded by falling across the table and knocking over a silver candlestick.

In the ensuing excitement, Mr. Briggim, remembering his earlier anxieties concerning that day, asked Charlie Doyle to step into the corridor "on a matter of utmost urgency."

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"You know, dear fellow," Briggim enunciated, his arm draped over Charlie's back, "that it just won't do for you to stay at the bank."

Charlie roared with laughter, understanding this as a joke.

"Don't laugh. I must clarify myself. Very important. Utmost, indeed. Why do you suppose Lucius gives you such a lot of money? He expects you're going to leave the bank."

Although Charlie had had even more to drink than Briggim, he would not have likely fallen for this ruse, had he not known, as Briggim did not, that Vole wished the position of junior auditor to be free for his son. He slapped his brow.

"By Jove! Of course."

Briggim had not thought this proposal would be accepted so easily. It simplified matters.

"Mr. Vole has been very thoughtful. The money is enough, with the sale of the silver, to set you up in business in a small way. Especially in the West. Chicago, St. Louis, Minnesota: they're wide open. You'll never have the chance again."

"Just wait till I tell Cecily. The West. Yes, that would be exciting."

"And the money, Charles. Think what you can do. The opportunities."

Over the teacups and the brandy snifters, the wedding party considered further of this scheme. Cecily's parents did not oppose it, as one might have expected; indeed, they showed a certain practical wisdom in encouraging the newlyweds to get out of range of their benefactor. It was decided that they would leave that very afternoon. Briggim promised to forward to Charlie his personal effects from the office.

The wedding party toasted the bride and groom once more and sang a chorus of "For they're a jolly good fellow." Charlie took out his cigar case and distributed a large dark-brown cigar to each of the gentlemen. Briggim accepted one to avoid giving offense and wrapped it in his pocket handkerchief. There was another round of brandy, and Briggim, with tears in his eyes, kissed Cecily and took his leave of the happy pair. At the door, Charlie told Briggim to thank Vole again for him, to explain his sudden departure, and to convey his fondest wishes for the success of Vole's son.

"And since I'm leaving so suddenly," he explained, "I think it only fair that Mr. Vole withhold the twenty dollars back pay due me. Tell him I said so."

Once returned to the bank, Briggim did not follow Charlie's instructions to the letter, but went directly to his own office.

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There was the entire day's work still to be done, and it was already past three. As was his habit in beginning the day, Briggim reached for the postal expenditures ledger, then checked himself. Strangely, he felt none of the distress that he had associated with that book for the last month—no grim forebodings or twists of the stomach, only a benign indifference. He shrugged his shoulders, a highly uncharacteristic gesture.

He examined a few papers that Charlie had left on his desk, but the columns of figures resisted his full attention. He decided that he needed a rest. After all, he had only that day returned from his sickbed. Besides, unrelieved work dulls the senses and causes errors.

Briggim settled back in his chair and thought of Charlie and his bride. He felt the warmest affection for them and thought it sad that they would never know this. It was entirely for this reason that Briggim had seen to it that Charlie did not return to the office that afternoon. Because if he did. . . .

Briggim's mind was not quite clear on this point, although he knew it was a good thing. He chuckled, remembering the old dotard falling over the candlestick. Some people did not age well.

It was very warm in the office. There was no window and the gas jets burned continuously. Briggim removed his coat, and the cigar rapped in his handkerchief dropped out of the pocket. Now that would be a real treat, he thought. He would round out the banquet properly. He looked in Charlie's drawer for sulphur matches, without success. Then an inspiration struck him. He bit off one end of the cigar and lit it at the gas jet. It burned evenly, filling the narrow room with its rich aroma.

Briggim settled back in his chair. Life could be very good, if you knew what to look for. Briggim hadn't. He had let the damnable ledger-book rule his life, and it had always deceived him, led him in the wrong direction. Someone like Charlie had the right idea. A beautiful wife and a cozy home. Children. Eat hearty, drink your fill, and have a good cigar. Not worry about money all the time. Not worry about the future. The future had spoiled Briggim's life.

Briggim pictured Charlie in his home in the West, sitting before a roaring log fire, toasting his feet at the fender, Cecily at his side. He could have had a life like that. Well, he wasn't going to be tricked anymore.

Not by the figures of the ledger-book—nor yet by their absence. The day was nearly over

(Continued on page 130)

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(continued from page 4)

ly. Perhaps I should say that I'm disgusted! Have no objection to judicious editing, but eliminating one of my main points and perverting another is definitely unethical in my opinion.

My analysis of your letter column indicates that many of the readers want more reprints and prefer fantasy to science fiction. If you believe such a policy would be ruinous, why in perdition don't you forthrightly express such? You also give the impression that sex is a taboo factor in modern s/f artwork. Give me the good old days of Seabury Quinn and heaving bosoms. More Gray Mouser tales are in order, at least.

James R. Goodrich
7 Third Street
Somerville, New Jersey

● *Sex is not taboo. Heaving bosoms are. There is not necessarily an equivalence between the two. The Gray Mouser, due again in our August issue, reports the heaving bosoms are becoming passé in Lankhmar, as well.*

Dear Editor:

The new artist Frank Bruno has a fine, creative cover for the April, 1963 issue of FANTASTIC. The interior illos for "Some Fabulous Yonder" by Philip José Farmer are something rather unique; here's hoping his work will appear in future issues.

For the life of me I can't see the big fuss over the new writer Roger Zelazny. I will admit only that he tries to be original; the problem is—*he isn't.* Now some of his hack work is better than others, such as "Final Dining," published in this magazine for February. Originality does not always come in hunk doses. With time, Mr. Zelazny will become an accomplished writer.

I always get excited over a story by David R. Bunch, the only half-way "Beat" writer in science-fantasy. His April "Survival Packages" is *typical* Bunch: superb. Fans can stomp him all they wish, but Bunch is telling us how he *feels* about humanity's impending problems, the best and only way he knows how—from the heart.

"The Casket-Demon" has that fine, needle-point shrill of fear . . . and wonder . . . that is typical with the best of Fritz Leiber. While soft touches of humor blend beautifully, there is no question about the power of the story. And the back cover illo by Lee Brown Coye is enough to make the stoutest heart slumber.

Bill Wolfenbarger
602 West Hill Street
Neosho, Missouri

● *Do we detect a groundswell building for the much-maligned Bunch?*

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FINAL AUDIT

(Continued from page 126)

and the phantoms he had conjured with his fears had vanished like smoke. The gas jets, for instance; he had no reason to fear them. *He didn't fear them.* Actually, he thought, that roseate light could bode no ill. Filling the office with its cheerful glow, it was the stuff of warmth and tenderness, like the bridal pair.

He felt very warm. A drowsy contentment crept over him. He sighed deeply and closed his eyes. The pictures that he drew in his imagination lost their sharp edges, blurred, merged with other, ill-remembered pictures. A parade of figures from his past marshalled themselves before his inner eye, like the figures in the column of the ledger. Some of the names he could not remember though he tried.

As he fell asleep, his hand drooped over the edge of the chair. The burning cigar, held loosely in his thin, ink-stained fingers, was poised directly over the pile of excelsior from Charlie's present.

THE END

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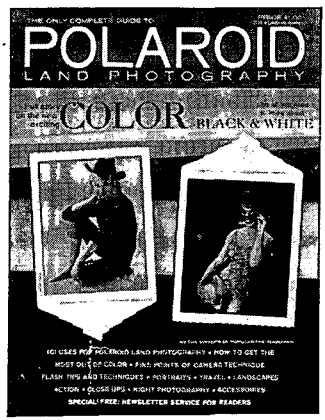

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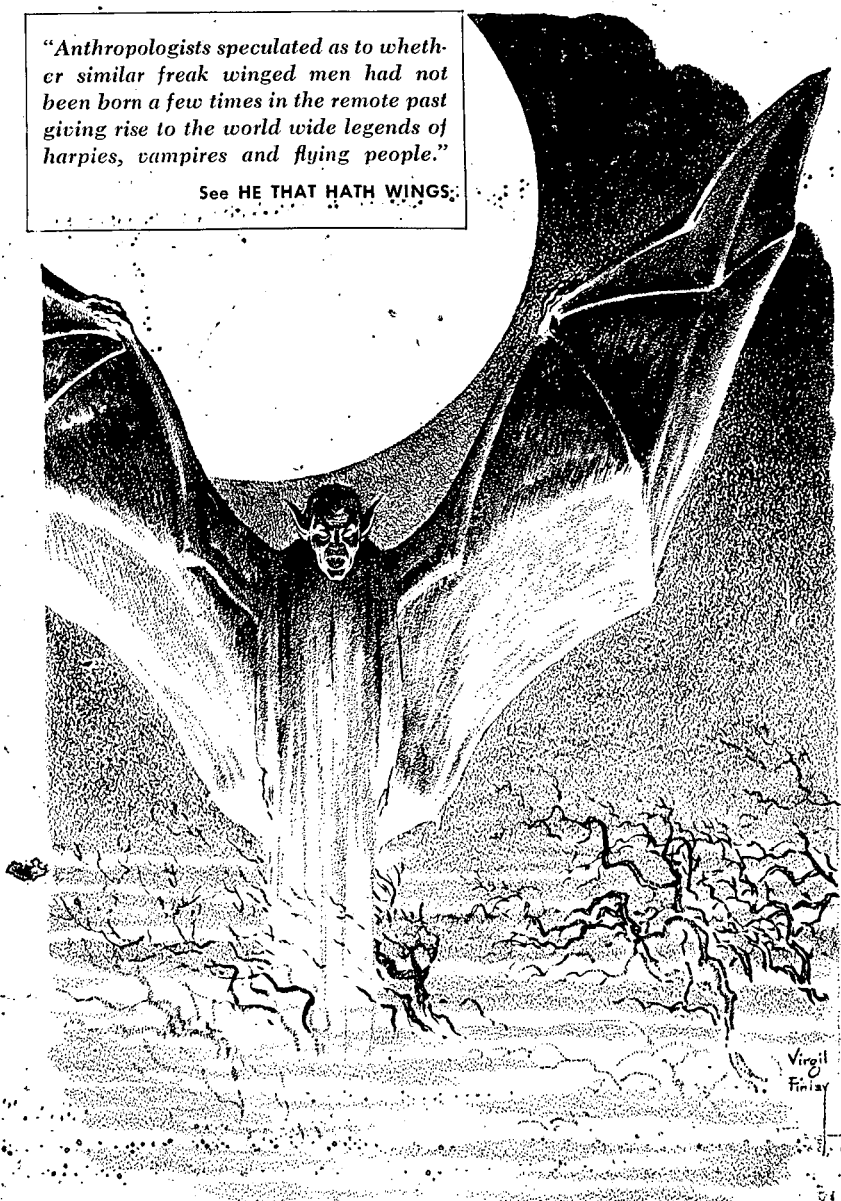

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